

Sketch

'Peace of Kofi' blesses MPs



John Ezard

WHEN one of Tony Blair's predecessors announced the lethally short-lived Munich agreement 50 years ago, a pre-war Guardian parliamentary sketch writer caught the mood in a sweetly sardonic sentence. "Members of the House of Commons got as near today to a sense of the peace of God that passeth all understanding as human beings are ever likely to do," Francis Boyd wrote.

It was a bit like that in the Commons yesterday when Mr Blair made his statement on peace with Iraq. In 1938 the intensity of relief was because everyone was terrified of being bombed by Hitler with relative impunity. Yesterday it was because almost everyone was horrified at the prospect of bombing another country with total military impunity.

The need not to do that might feel temporary, and the small print still passeth understanding for many. But it was still tremendously welcome. This may be seen as a kind of moral advance. Tony Blair voiced the idea gracefully when he said the chief joy in Kofi Annan's agreement was that "tens of thousands of civilians will not be spared from a death which could not in any way have been caused by their behaviour".

But his next sentences ran into savage murmurs from his own benches. Mr Blair credited Mr Annan for "rescuing the United Nations from the attempt by the United States to dominate it". Then he asked: "Will you accept that there were many people, including myself, who were very disappointed that a Labour government would have been prepared to go in and use force against the majority view, not only of the Security Council, but of world opinion?"

Tony Blair gave not the slightest quarter: "My right

honourable friend is entitled to his views. My right honourable friend enjoys a freedom here he would not enjoy in Iraq."

The UN secretary-general would reject Mr Benn's version of events. Only when Saddam Hussein knew we were serious about force did he begin to make concessions. That was the firm, on-message theme of the afternoon.

Based overwhelmingly on relief, it was endorsed by virtually all Mr Benn's colleagues. Gerald Kaufman, a former shadow foreign secretary, got reverberating "hear hears" by denouncing "ap-pearances in this House and in the soft-soap press" who, he said, would have made Mr Annan's agreement impossible.

"Will you confirm that this is it?" he asked Mr Blair.

"That if this agreement is broken by Saddam Hussein then force will inevitably follow?" His leader avoided saying Yes, making do with a repetition of what he had told Mr Benn about Saddam.

Mr Blair's 10-minute announcement was brief, confident and unambitious. Only the deepened crows' feet around his eyes betrayed that he and others had been through a period of strain. All the heavily emphasised buzz-phrases in his speech won the reactions he was aiming for from most MPs of all parties.

"The UN Security Council cannot accept that any areas remain off limits" (hear hear). "We are not going to play more elaborate diplomatic games" (ditto). "Inspections wherever and whenever they wish to inspect" (ditto).

William Hague and Paddy Ashdown were consummately supportive. Mr Ashdown with the session's first dash of rhetoric about the "literally incalculable debt" owed to Kofi Annan.

Then, after half an hour of unanimity which might have seemed excessive even in an Iraqi parliament, if such a place existed, a small figure in a white suit rose and left the chamber without feeling that he needed to speak.

It was the signal everyone had been waiting for. In every trouble spot all over the world, everyone has known for 20 years that when Martin Bell decides to go home, peace has definitely broken out. For a time, anyway.

Weapons inspection chief plans early visit to Baghdad □ Security Council gives pact general approval

US and Britain to test Iraq

Mark Tran in New York and Ian Black in London

THE United States and Britain will quickly test Iraq's readiness to keep its agreement with the UN, as they try to blind Russia and France into a pledge of automatic air strikes if Saddam Hussein triggers a new crisis over weapons inspections.

Kofi Annan, the UN secretary-general, returned from his make-or-break mission to Baghdad yesterday to cheer crowds of UN employees, and praised the role played by President Bill Clinton and Tony Blair — whom he termed "perfect UN peacekeepers" — in persuading the Iraqi leader to back down.

Iraq continued to trumpet victory over its enemies. Its deputy premier, Tariq Aziz, claimed the 11th-hour agree-

ment had brought "excellent gains" that meant punitive UN economic sanctions would eventually be lifted.

But the US made clear there would be a quick test of Iraqi intentions, with Richard Butler, chairman of the UN special commission, Unscow, visiting Baghdad next week to ensure immediate implementation.

Washington kept up a drumbeat of warning, as its UN ambassador, Tom Richardson, called for an "enforcement initiative" in a Security Council resolution that would warn Iraq of "serious consequences" if it reneged.

In the Commons in London, Mr Blair used near-identical language about the proposed British resolution to lock President Saddam into the Baghdad agreement. "This must make clear that any further prevarication or obstruction of the smooth operation of inspections... will not be accepted by any member of

the Security Council and will inescapably be followed by the most severe consequences for the Iraqi regime," he said.

British diplomats said they hoped to push through the resolution within the next few days. "It should be easier to get the French on board now Annan is back with a deal," one said.

But France repeated that it would not support any resolution allowing automatic attacks if Iraq breached the accord. Russia is likely to follow suit.

France's president, Jacques Chirac, discussed a possible joint resolution with the Russian president, Boris Yeltsin, yesterday after having a similar discussion late on Monday with Mr Clinton. His foreign minister, Hubert Vedrine, insisted: "It will be up to the Security Council to see if there is trickery or not... not just the US."

Where the French were op-

timistic, Madeleine Albright, the US secretary of state, said there were "questions and ambiguities" in Mr Annan's agreement, and that the US would close "any loopholes".

Strikingly, however — and whatever Mr Aziz claims — the seven-point deal gives Iraq little more than the face-saving formula of allowing diplomats to accompany UN weapons inspectors on visits to "presidential sites" where chemical and biological weapons may be concealed.

Mrs Albright told the Senate foreign relations committee: "This may be acceptable if the inspectors are free to conduct rigorous inspections."

Mr Blair made clear there would be no immediate change in the readiness of British or US armed forces in the Gulf. Sanctions would remain until full compliance with UN resolutions on weapons of mass destruction.

"We will not tolerate any

repetition of the Iraqi behaviour which has led to this agreement," he warned. "We are not going to play more elaborate diplomatic games that allow Saddam Hussein to thwart the inspections regime which he has now agreed."

Hundreds of employees applauded and cheered Mr Annan as he arrived at UN headquarters in scenes of jubilation not seen for years.

Staff heard him describe his mission as "a wonderful example of what the UN should be about". Clearly tired from his exertions, Mr Annan said: "There were millions of people around the world rooting for peace, that is why I say you should never underestimate the power of prayer."

After briefing the Security Council, Mr Annan said he had received the general approval of the 15 members to the agreement, although details remained to be worked out. Mr Annan said the latest

accord should work because there was a qualitative difference between it and past understandings.

This is the first time an agreement had been negotiated by President Saddam himself, he said, describing the Iraqi leader as calm, well-informed and decisive. "The [Iraqi] leadership has got the message to co-operate with Unscow," he said.

Mr Annan said he established a good human rapport with President Saddam, who told the secretary-general: "I know I can do business with you, I think I can trust you."

Mr Annan sought to dispel the notion that the new arrangement would undermine Mr Butler, who has been roundly criticised by the Iraqis. He remains the head of Unscow, Mr Annan said.

Long camp in Gulf, page 6; Leader comment and letters, page 9

Review

Finding serenity amid the chaos

Alfred Hickling

Vienna Philharmonic/
Riccardo Muti
Bridgewater Hall, Manchester

HOW do you persuade people to listen to Paul Hindemith? One way is to engage a world-class orchestra and star conductor. Another is to harness him to a central 19th-century symphony as Brahms and leave you to form your own conclusions.

The visit of the Vienna Philharmonic under Riccardo Muti is perhaps the first time an orchestra of truly sublime status has bathed in the warm acoustics of Manchester Bridgewater Hall, and happily they have brought Hindemith with them.

Hindemith's second symphony is enigmatic almost to the point of invisibility: no programme, no number, no grandiose title, and not many performances in this country recently.

It does have a key, however. E flat, from which it adventurously sets out and obligingly returns 40 breathtaking minutes later, confounding along the way every remaining shred of audience-hostile earache still clinging to early 20th-century orchestral music.

Composed in 1940 and nestling between the better known Mahler and the more remote Brahms, the Vienna Philharmonic play Brahms like most people breathe oxygen, of course, although even the immaculate brass had gone slightly off the boil after the interval.

No matter: to tickle a Manchester audience already beside themselves with delight, Muti coyly announced a bonus pairing of Josef Strauss polkas — one fast, the other furious — which emphatically put the icing on the sacher-torte.

This review appeared in later editions yesterday.

And in this sense it is the sound of an artist trying to salvage meaning, even beauty, from a world pitched into catastrophe — prefiguring Bernstein and echoing Auden in his age of anxiety.

What is surprising, however, is the overall coherence, even serenity, of the piece. Having stared into the abyss, Hindemith came up with the conclusion that there is plenty worth living for, after all.

This was the man who wrote perhaps the most important treatise on tonality this century, having opted not to colour his canvases with chaos. Nor is Muti inclined to let the work unfold without undue restraint.

Padding towards the podium with the stiff-backed, panther-footed tread of someone with either extreme authority or an appalling migraine, this was a performance marked with precision and discipline, coaxed from one of the few orchestras in the world equipped to provide him with what he was looking for.

Brahms's second symphony sounds familiar, tame, even remote, in this company. The Vienna Philharmonic play Brahms like most people breathe oxygen, of course, although even the immaculate brass had gone slightly off the boil after the interval.

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Southall rail crash inquiry delay

Keith Harper
Transport Editor

THE public will be kept informed on safety issues raised by the Southall rail crash last September in which seven people died, the inquiry chairman, John Uff, promised yesterday.

The inquiry into the worst rail accident since the Clapham disaster in 1989 was opened and adjourned, the

official investigation may take 18 months to complete.

Professor Uff said: "No one should have the impression that these matters will not be considered until after this inquiry is completed."

The reason for the inquiry delay is that a decision is still awaited on whether criminal prosecutions will be taken against the driver, Larry Harrison, currently on bail, or Great Western Trains, or Railtrack.



Models on the catwalk yesterday as Paul Smith showed off his winter collection during London Fashion Week

Girls will be boys in Smith debut

Susannah Frankel
Fashion Editor

IT was a great moment for British fashion when Paul Smith took to the London catwalk for the first time yesterday. While Smith shows his menswear line in Paris, London will be home to his womenswear from now on.

The designer introduced womenswear to his repertoire four years ago in response to women borrowing their boyfriends' "Smithy" clothing, as he puts it.

Not surprisingly, more than half of his debut London show was taken up by masculine good looks. There were taupe trouser-suits boasting Smith's signature winduppane check, in this instance in lilac — the colour was picked up in jacket linings and skirts — and there were grey pinstripes worn with crisp white shirts and, for the eve-

ning, immaculate black velvet creations.

Rather than copying his menswear, however, Smith was ever mindful of the female form — a nipped-in waist here, a pair of elegant trousers there. More overtly feminine were crushed velvet, empire-line dresses in dusty pink and old gold worn with pretty embroidered kimonos.

Nothing is more indicative of London's augmented status as a fashion capital to rival Paris and Milan than Smith's decision to show. He has always been deeply patriotic but declined to show in London because "it's not where the business is".

Now though, London Fashion Week is a very different affair. "Our designers are bringing in the goods and I'm very happy to show here for that reason," he said.

If yesterday's reception was anything to go by, Britain is very happy to have him too.

Now though, London Fashion Week is a very different affair. "Our designers are bringing in the goods and I'm very happy to show here for that reason," he said.

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Judge sexually harassed pupil

continued from page 1

had personally suffered it.

The findings because no complaints had ever been lodged with the Bar Council. But women barristers said pupils did not complain for fear of blighting their careers. A squeeze on numbers means only half of those who pass the Bar exams can expect to find positions in chambers.

Following the research the Bar brought in a five-point strategy to tackle harassment — an advice hotline; "strong advice" to chambers on handling complaints; a panel of barristers to advise complainants and mediate; streamlined complaints procedures; and, as a last resort, a scheme under which chambers volunteer to take in pupils driven out by harassment.

A follow-up study by the Sheffield Institute, to be published soon, shows that harassment is now seen as less of a problem than in 1993. But a senior QC recently left one set of chambers for another leading set after admit-

ting making unwanted advances to a chambers employee. No formal complaint was made.

In another case, a male pupil has accused a female barrister of harassing him, but no complaint has reached the Bar Council.

Nigel Peacock QC, chairman of the Bar's public affairs committee, said: "The Bar will not tolerate harassment of any barrister or pupil. They are in a very vulnerable position. We have now a code in place to prevent this happening and I am confident that harassment today is rare."

Mr Sutton-Mattocks's chambers said he was out of the country and not available for comment. A senior clerk said: "We have no comment to make."

A spokeswoman for the Lord Chancellor's Department said Lord Irvine would have to decide whether Mr Sutton-Mattocks should remain as a recorder once he was notified of the tribunal's findings.

Guardian wins Press Club award

Staff Reporter

THE Guardian yesterday won a prestigious award from the London Press Club for its investigation into the disgraced former Conservative MP Jonathan Aitken.

The paper was commended for its libel victory over the former cabinet minister, whose court action against the Guardian collapsed last summer.

Bob Edwards, chairman of the judges, and a former national newspaper editor, paid tribute to the Guardian's award-winning editorial team.

He said: "Their aim was to establish the truth about a grave and scandalous matter concerning a Privy Counsellor. They showed true grit in standing up to Mr Aitken and his pompous threats."

The Freedom of the Press Award was presented to the Guardian's editor, Alan

Rushbridger, by Charles Overby, of the Freedom Forum, an American journalistic foundation.

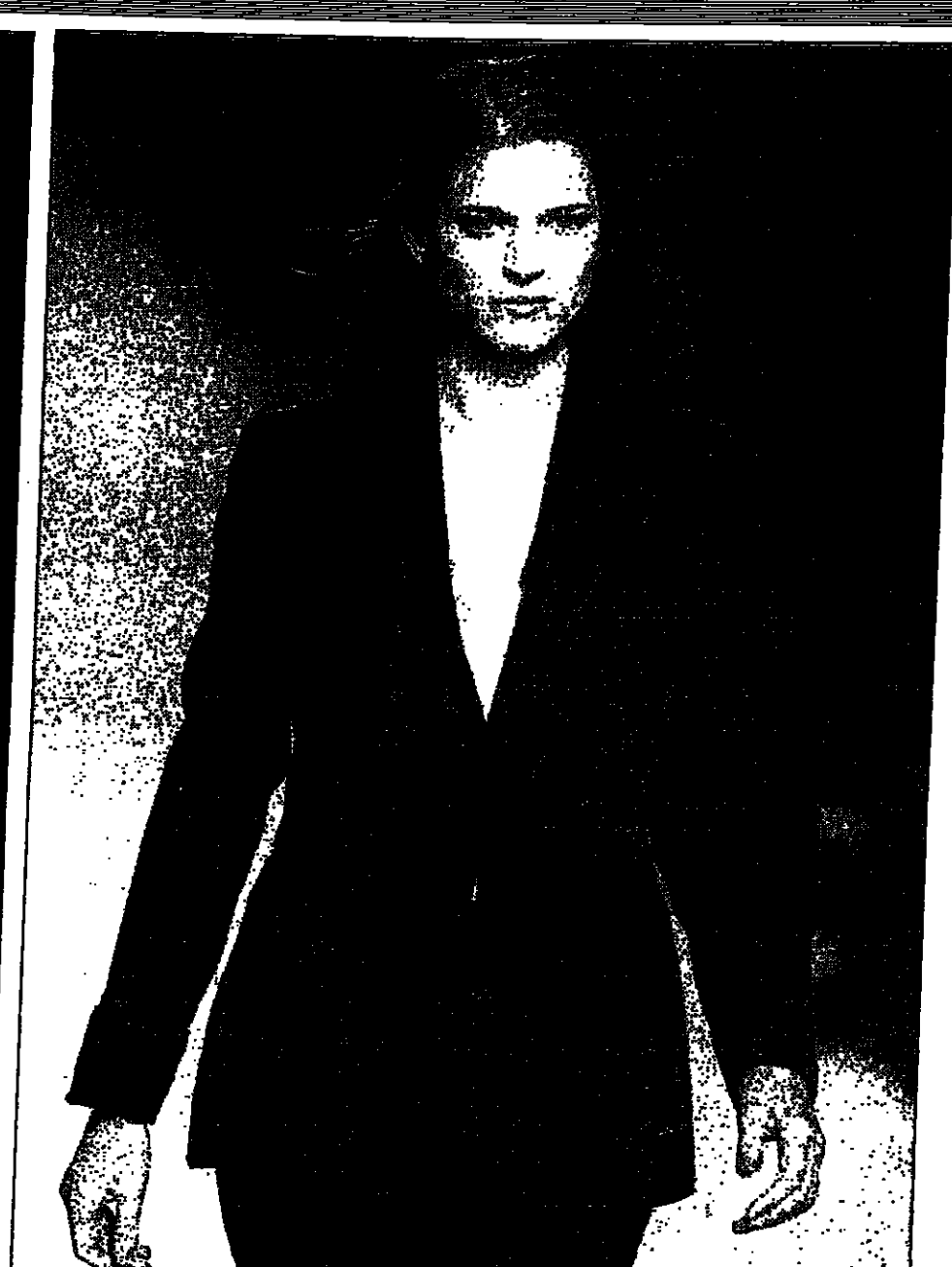
The Guardian's team included comment editor David Leigh and reporters David Pallister, Luke Harding and Owen Bowcott.

Other awards were won by Simon Jenkins, columnist for the Times and Evening Standard, and Charles Miller, the Press Association's defence and diplomatic reporter.

Miller won Scoop of the Year for breaking the story of the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, from Manilla airport last August, while with the Foreign Secretary Robin Cook during his Far East tour.

Robin McKie, of the Observer, was highly commended for breaking the story of the cloning of Dolly the sheep.

Scotland Yard has yet to conclude its nine-month investigation into the Jonathan Aitken affair.



PHOTOGRAPHS: STEFAN ROUSSEAU (left) and PAUL HACKETT

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Robert Johnson
1911-1938

Cover versions... the limited recordings of hard-living, hard-playing Robert Johnson still influence musicians 60 years after he died from drinking poisoned whiskey

Devilish good fortune for son of bluesman

Ed Vulliamy in New York

A COURT in Mississippi has settled a wrangle over inheritance rights to the music of the century's most opaque genius, the extraordinary Robert Johnson, master of the blues, who, now past his illegitimate son, died.

Ownership of Johnson's legendary songs and out-takes — the influence of which has resounded through the histories of jazz, blues and rock — now pass to his illegitimate son, Claud.

Johnson was poisoned to death, intestate, in Greenwood, Mississippi, in 1938. For the past six years, Claud Johnson has challenged two other relatives, Robert Harris and Anne Anderson, for rights to the haunting and haunted music of his father.

Anderson, who has been executor of the estate for several years, joined Harris in trying to block the claim which Claud Johnson brought in 1992.

But the Mississippi court threw out their argument that Claud had waited too long to bring his action, and decreed him owner of his father's "music, likeness and story".

Claud now stands to take at least a cut of future revenue generated by the music and other legacies — some \$3 million to date, none of which has gone to Johnson's descendants.

Most of the money from record sales, limited edition guitars, books and film has thus far gone to Columbia Records and some to blues historian Stephen LaVere, who has devoted his life to researching Johnson's music and in 1973 bought limited rights from Johnson's now deceased half-sister Carrie Spencer.

Robert Johnson was born the grandson of slaves near Hazlehurst, Mississippi, in 1911. He was an illegitimate child whose mother, Julia Dodds, worked the first years of his life in migrant labour camps, before moving to Memphis to bring him up as Robert Spencer in a ménage-

a-trois. In 1920, Julia Dodds moved again, to Robinsville, Mississippi, where her son's music career began.

The young Johnson was a neglected child but soon met the masters of the Mississippi Delta blues, Willie Brown and bluesman-preacher Son House, who were playing the "hook joints" in Robinsville.

First performing on the steps of the local courthouse, Johnson went on to synthesise everything that had come before him in the blues, and to dictate everything that would follow.

Johnson spent his life crossing the Delta of the Depression years, finding a woman with whom to stay in every town, and went north to play the subterranean dives in the slums of Detroit, New York and Chicago.

He took the oral traditions of the rural blues — field hollers of defiance, chants of tribulation, and bottleneck guitar — stretched their limits musically and emotionally, and forged his own inimitable style.

Only 11 78 rpm records of Johnson's songs were released during his lifetime. As with so many artists of genius, his influence came later.

Bluesmen who took on the Johnson legacy included Sonny Boy Williamson, Howlin' Wolf, Johnny Shines, Memphis Slim, Muddy Waters and Elmore James, while among today's rock stars Eric Clapton, Bob Dylan and the Rolling Stones claim him as a profound influence.

The themes of Johnson's music were despair, self-destruction, constant rambling, homesickness for places that had come with hindsight to represent happiness, and pursuit by demons.

His fervent music was so remarkable that he was commonly believed to have made a pact with the devil — at a crossroads and at midnight — in exchange for the gift of his voice and mastery over the guitar.

Johnson's most famous song, Cross Road Blues, concerns a rendezvous with the devil on a lonely intersection. It is a haunting work, de-

Singing the praises



Keith Richards:
"The greatest folk blues guitarist that ever lived." "He was like a comet or a meteor that — boom — came along suddenly. He raised the ante and suddenly you had to aim that much higher."



Eric Clapton:
"Both of the Robert Johnson albums cover all of my desires musically. Every angle of emotion is expressed on both those albums."

Alexis Korner,
the godfather of British blues:
"It would be impossible to overestimate Johnson's importance either as a performer or style setter for later blues artists."

"He communicates the kind of delicious vision one associates with William Blake."

Johnson's moods swung dramatically: he became progressively broodier and more pensive as he reached his mid-twenties, immediately enlivened by a few drinks, for which he lacked the head.

He was a small man, delicate, spindly, handsome and irresistible to women. Johnson's musical landscape of itinerant depravity is occasionally illuminated by the overt sexuality of classics like I Believe I'll Dust My Broom

and the lachrymose tenderness of Kind Hearted Woman. His first wife died in childbirth, aged 18, but Johnson married again, to "Calle" Craft, several years his senior. She kept and adored him, no one knowing she was his wife, until she suffered a breakdown and died shortly after Johnson left her to tour the Delta again in the mid-thirties.

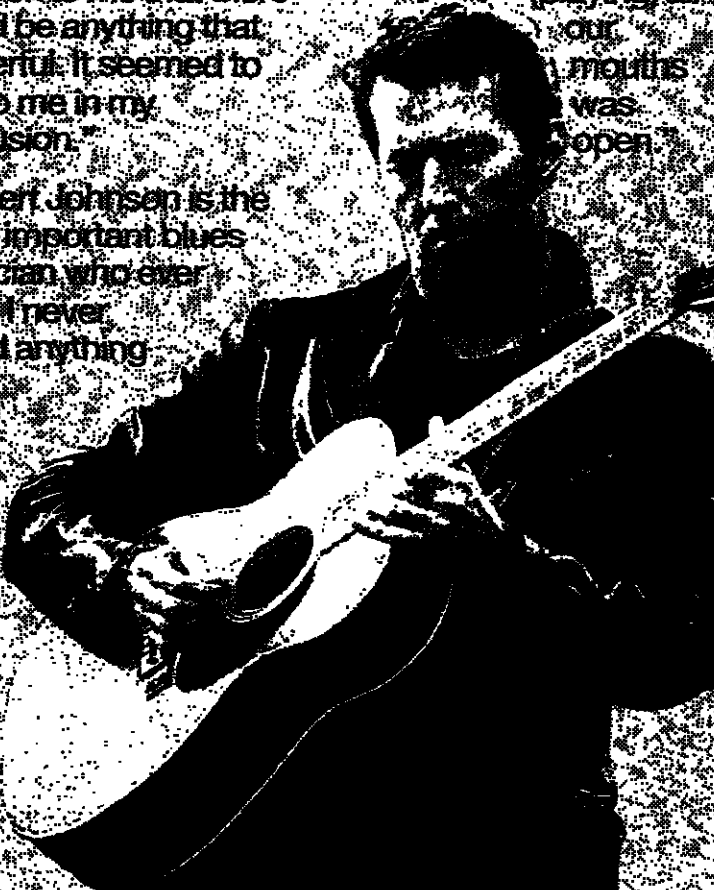
At the age of 27, Johnson was reportedly poisoned by a house manager who had

more deeply soulful. His music remains the most powerful cry that I think you can find in the human voice."

Blues singer who travelled with Johnson:
"His home was where his hat was and sometimes he didn't even know where that was."

Son House,
legendary blues guitarist and contemporary of Johnson:
"He sold his soul to the devil to get to play like that."

"When he got through (playing) all our mouths was open."



Princess Margaret stable after stroke

Luke Harding

PRINCESS Margaret was recovering in hospital in Barbados last night after suffering a mild stroke while holidaying on the Caribbean island of Mustique.

The princess, who is 67, was in a stable condition, Buckingham Palace said.

She collapsed at 10pm on Monday while being entertained by friends. She was treated at an island clinic but returned home when it was found she was well enough to walk.

She had been due to leave Mustique yesterday, after nearly three weeks, to continue her holiday in St Lucia. Instead, she was flown by air ambulance to Barbados for further hospital tests.

The princess is responding well to treatment and has suffered no serious paralysis, it is understood.

Ken Will, assistant to the director of the Mustique Company, which runs the island, said: "She was able to walk from her car across the tarmac to the plane. She was also sitting on the plane."

"Certainly at this stage the signs are positive. She has been consulted throughout and is fully cognizant. A decision was taken not to fly her off the island immediately but to wait until Tuesday afternoon instead."

She was accompanied to Barbados by Michael Bumbury, Mustique's doctor, who has supervised her treatment. Her doctors in London have also been consulted. Tests to assess her condition were expected to be carried out at one of the two main hospitals in Barbados — the Bayview and the Queen Elizabeth — before she is flown back to Britain.

Despite her hard-drinking, chain-smoking image, the Queen's younger sister has been in reasonable health since 1993, when she suffered a bout of pneumonia and was admitted to hospital. She gave up smoking some years ago.

In 1985 she was at the centre of a cancer scare and had

surgery to remove a small area of her left lung, which proved to be benign. She last appeared in public earlier this month, on a visit to the Queen Mother, who was recovering in a London hospital from her hip operation.

Lord Snowdon, her former husband, was last night said to be "most concerned" about the princess. Her son, David Linley, and his wife, Serena, had been holidaying with her until Sunday, when they moved to Florida where Viscount Linley is preparing to exhibit his furniture.

Princess Margaret spends an annual holiday on Mustique, where she has a hilltop villa, and she has many friends on the island.

She was introduced to Mustique by Colin Tennant, now Lord Glenconner, who gave her a 10-acre estate on the island for a wedding present in 1960. She has enjoyed the gift ever since, and her cooking parties there have become legendary.

In recent years, she has concentrated on charity engagements and her family, spending much time with the Queen and the Queen Mother at Sandringham.

The Queen yesterday pressed on with her official engagements, which included knighting the singer Elton John at an investiture ceremony at Buckingham Palace.



Princess Margaret: able to walk to evacuation plane

Israel's rabbis put curfew on women

David Sharruck in Jerusalem

SOMETIMES it's hard to be a woman. It just got harder in Israel, where a panel of rabbis has ruled that wives must be home by midnight.

The early doors declaration of the rabbinical court of Haifa was prompted by divorce proceedings by a man who complained his wife was in the habit of visiting singles bars and staying out until the morning.

Under Israeli law there is no civil marriage or divorce and Jews seeking a legal separation must apply to their local rabbinical court, even if they are not religious.

The declaration has been endorsed by the chief rabbinical court in Jerusalem, but would be virtually impossible to enforce.

According to the newspaper Yediot Aharanot, which reported the case without names, the man's wife protested to the rabbis: "But he is sleeping with other women." Al-

though the court conceded that this, too, was "insufferable", the rabbis insisted the wife should be home by midnight.

"And then people wonder why we want a separation of state and religion?" Naomi Chazan, an MP for the leftwing Meretz party, said yesterday when she heard the news. "This decision is so paternalistic it takes Israel back to the Middle Ages."

This is not the first time that women have come in for special attention from Israel's rabbis. Last year Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, the spiritual leader of the government's ultra-Orthodox partner, Shas, warned women that if they took a shower on the Sabbath they were committing a crime.

Another venerated sage, Rabbi Kadouri, who last week threw a protective mystical cloak over Israel when he boarded a plane and flew around its borders, chanting prayers and cursing Iraqi president Saddam Hussein, proclaimed women would "burn in hell" if they wore wigs.

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24/11/98

Millennium plan unveiled

Welcome to the pleasure dome

Dan Glatzer
Arts Correspondent

ARIDE through a dream world on giant floating beds, a visit to a seaside resort with a difference, and a virtual reality playground were just three of the ideas for the Millennium Dome unveiled by Tony Blair yesterday.

A model of the much-talked about giant human figure was also revealed, although organisers refused to say whether it would be male or female.

Presenting what was billed as a "re-launch" of the £758 million project Mr Blair hailed the dome as a huge asset for the country. It would, he said, be a "symbol of British confidence and a monument to our creativity and a fantastic day out."

Peter Mandelson, the minister without portfolio, in charge of the project, said: "If the Millennium Dome is a success, it will never be forgotten. If it is a failure, we will never be forgiven."

Organisers announced £58.8 million of sponsorship for the project, with British Telecom, Tesco, Manpower and BSkyB each committing £12 million. A further £16 million has been pledged but awaits detailed negotiations, taking the total to almost £75 million, half the target figure.

The seven zones unveiled yesterday, representing just under half the dome's final contents, all reflect the design brief to combine learning and entertainment, technology and spirituality. Each zone will consume £5 million to £5 million of the budget. The Body Zone's giant human figure will tower over the other exhibits, so be arranged

are expressed through faith and belief". The zone will make use of natural materials and water to create what organisers call "oases of calm and reflection."

LICENSED TO SKILL and **THE LEARNING CURVE** Jennie Page, chief executive of the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC), said of the work zone: "It may sound worthy but in reality it will be fun. There will be 400 people in virtual reality helmets exploring new ways of work."

The zone aims to illustrate the changing nature of work and extend the virtues of the flexible labour market. Alongside it will be The Learning Curve, a zone exploring the classroom of the future.

SERIOUS PLAY The final zone unveiled yesterday. The most technologically advanced of the zones, from the outside it appears to be a sci-fi film set, perhaps a lunar station. Inside, a moving pavement will take visitors on a route through a canopy made of an inflated transparent skin that gently rises and falls. At the end of the ride visitors will enter a millennium products area, featuring leisure ideas for the next century.

The six zones yet to be unveiled are The Mind, TransAction, which will examine the role of money and finance; Shared Ground, looking at the future around the country; Atmosphere, about the planet; and Time To Talk, dedicated to communications. The final zone, unknown, will provide a forum to address national identity.

There will be three performances each day in the plaza which will attempt to bring together all the disparate elements of the exhibition. Originally to be run by theatrical impresario Sir Cameron Mackintosh, the show will now be staged by musician Peter Gabriel and Mark Fisher, who mounts shows for the Rolling Stones and other rock acts. The central show, which will play to 16,000 people, will be based around the idea of a millennium fable.

Evoking the atmosphere of New Year's Eve 1999 — the dome's opening night — Mr Blair told an audience of business leaders: "The eyes of the world will turn to the spot where the new millennium begins — the meridian line at Greenwich. This is Britain's opportunity to greet the world with a celebration that is so bold, so beautiful, so inspiring that it embodies at once the spirit of confidence and adventure in Britain and the spirit of the future in the world."

But the political row surrounding the £758 million project continued, with Tory culture spokesman Francis Maude renewing his attack on what he terms the "appropriation" of the project by Labour for party political purposes.

"Is Tony Blair big enough to declare the Millennium Dome a politician-free zone, or is he too mesmerised by the prospect of grandstanding before the world in the year before the election?"

Michael Heseltine, who as deputy prime minister launched the project and now represents the Tories on millennium matters, said: "I have access to all the information and I play what role I can in the decision-making process."

"The Conservative Party is represented at the heart of the matter. I will ensure that this is a project for the nation."

"It is not a party political activity." Echoing a call by the dome's architect, Lord Rogers, for a single creative figure to assume creative leadership of the project, a "ringmaster" or a "ringmaster", Mr Maude called for the appointment of a non-political figure to run the scheme, to replace Mr Mandelson.

roof of the dome, the figure, according to organisers, "is designed to amaze, with the world's biggest physical representation of the human form, a rich and intellectually accessible exploration."

Visitors will enter through a door at the small of the back. From there a lift will take them to the figure's head, where they see out to the rest of the dome. Back at ground level, visitors will be taken on a moving walkway along the figure's outstretched leg, while biological and visual representations are projected on the walls.

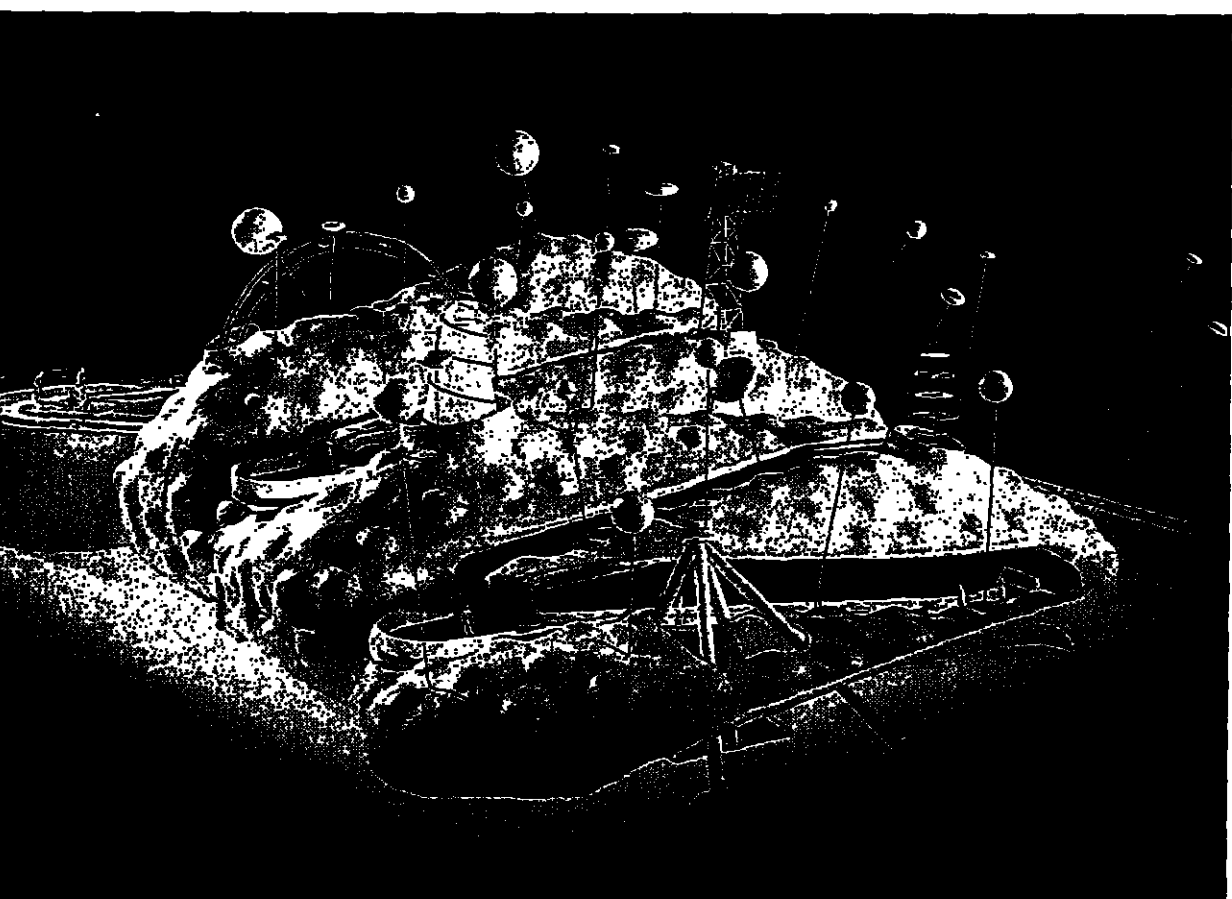
Once outside the body, visitors will see live exhibits and a perpetually running medical TV programme and will be able to assess their own health on running machines.

The aim, said designer Jonathan Swabey, was to explore. The 5,000 visitors expected each hour would be prompted to ponder on our species.



DREAMSCAPE: Giant beds floating on a river which flows through four environments

PICTURES: HAYES DAVIDSON



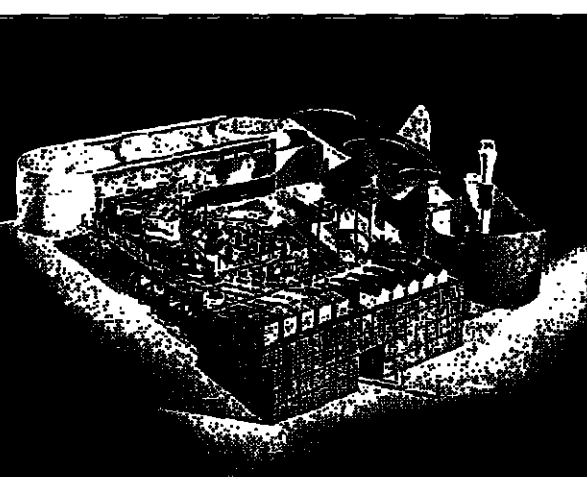
SERIOUS PLAY: The most technologically advanced zone, with a moving pavement under an inflated transparent skin



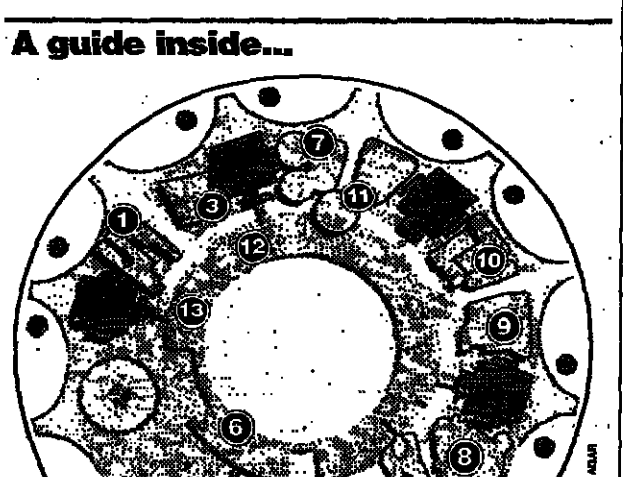
THE LEARNING CURVE: Classroom of the future



THE SPIRIT LEVEL: "Oases of calm and reflection"



THE LIVING ISLAND: Seaside resort with serious purpose



A guide inside...

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| 1 The Mind | Discover the creative power inherent in us all |
| 2 The Body Zone | Voyage into the human machine |
| 3 Spirit Level | Experience a moment of peace and reflection |
| 4 Licensed to Skill | Match your skills to the new world of work |
| 5 The Learning Curve | Open your mind to life-long learning |
| 6 TransAction | See how finance is changing your life |
| 7 Dreamscape | Discover imagine and re-activate your life |
| 8 Serious Play | Find out how leisure can re-activate your life |
| 9 Shared Ground | Examine the future of the British Isles |
| 10 Living Island | Protect your environment day by day |
| 11 Atmosphere | Experience the wonder of your planet |
| 12 Time to Talk | Learn better ways of talking to each other |
| 13 UK@now | Britain's future for all of us |

Project finds little enthusiasm far from Greenwich

Peter Hetherington tests the water among Mandelson's constituents

MORE than 200 miles north of Greenwich, the people who put the millennium minister into Parliament appeared more apathetic than domophobes.

"No doubt it will become a major attraction for our southern purple cousins to visit," thundered a correspondent to the Hartlepool Mail.

"How many people in the North does he think can afford to take time off work — if they are lucky enough to be working — or finance a trip to London, pay for a hotel, pay entrance fees to see what another yuppie has found to appeal to a working man and his family?"

But the letter to editor Peter Barron was one of the few to criticise the local MP and Minister without Portfolio. "It is something so distant — London — that they're not bothered," said Mr Barron, fresh from a meeting to discuss what Hartlepool itself should arrange for the dawn of 2000.

"People here have a very strong local identity and are not too bothered about what is going on outside."

Nevertheless, the £750 million project occupied a full page in last night's newspaper, with the writer even suggesting that "amateur psychiatrists" had claimed that the Minister without Portfolio was obsessed with making the Millennium Dome a success because his grandfather, Herbert Morrison, never got sufficient recognition for his role in the 1951 Festival of Britain.

Mr Mandelson replied: "People have assumed I am

trying to do now for the country what my grandfather did then and that's not true. I don't see it in personal terms."

In the town's Engineers Club, a testament to the skills that made it famous, Tony Blair's vision of a dome "to unite the nation" was treated with a little incredulity. "It's another world down there," said Kathy, the assistant manager. "Too expensive to go there as well, and such a waste of money. They'd be better spending it on the health service."

Bus driver John, a former engineering worker, agreed. "It seems an awful lot of money when people are complaining about hospitals and the homeless and it'll be for such a short term, won't it? What will they do afterwards with it? Everyone I meet is very sceptical."

It all became too much for local councillor Harry Clouth, chairman of the town's social services committee. "Basically it's a good thing — new tech, and an attraction to lots of people from abroad. It will make a lot of money and not cost the Government a great deal. They'll flock to see it. Think of all the good things that have happened in this country — they've all been criticised before they got off the ground."

Outside the club Phil Ross, another former engineering worker, said he was being won over to the dome. "Everyone seems to be criticising it but they said the same thing not that long ago about the Angel of the North and now everyone seems to like it."

Celebrity views

Malcolm Bradbury, novelist and playwright: "This seems to be wildly conceptual — all about dreaming away into the future with a lot of alternative ideologies thrown around — and not to be rooted in any sense of achievement. I would have liked some celebration of what has been done in the last century, particularly in the arts. I'm not sure how this would be done, but we should be exhibiting the history of the 20th century achievements, paying particular reference to what's been achieved in Britain. We should be focusing on scientific, medical and technological advances, important developments in theatre, fiction and philosophy."

Lee Chapman, restaurateur, TV presenter and former Leeds United footballer: "I would like there to be a series of different indoor arenas for sport, and live performances of music and the arts. There should be these spaces for people to actually perform in as well as go and look at. This would bring long-term benefit to so many different people."

John Peel, Radio 1 DJ: "I can't see anything in this that would attract any right-minded person. The list doesn't sound terribly seductive. I can't imagine what could be put in there to make me want to go — nothing amusing or realistic. I've got to the point where I'm entirely unenthusiastic about the dome. It seems like a shocking waste of time and resources."

Michael Mansfield, QC: "What they have in mind is not what I have mind. One of the important things to me which is not included at all —

is that the millennium is not just a commemoration for the Christian world, but is a historic landmark of space, time and the universe. What would be an education, as well as an experience, would be if we could put this into some concrete, formal context showing how we are surviving — or not surviving — as a planet — where we have come from and where we are going to. The dome should look at the planet in terms of the universe on a space and time axis, and show that, in the context of this, we are the last second of a 24-hour day. That would be a true lesson."

Michael Winner, film director and restaurateur critic: "I would like it to contain a lavishly staged and choreographed with an orchestra of 60 players. Ideally, it would be a Mickey Mouse musical — but I'd accept any other major theatrical entertainment. That's what people want: they don't want to be educated — they get that in school. "This is not going to be some great, cultural event. It should just be totally celebratory and joyous and pure fun. I'd like every single thing in it to make people laugh — make them forget the horrors of the 21st century."

David Hare, playwright: "I couldn't give a bugger what they put in it. Whatever they put in it cannot reflect the true artistic vitality of the people on the street. I just wish they'd help people on the street and not be so properly rather than imposing this insane piece of statist grandiloquence."

Alan Bleasdale, writer: "I wouldn't like to see anything in there because I object to the concept passionately when there are other priorities."

In brief

INTERNET RECORD: Tesco said its £12 million SchoolNet 2000 millennium project would give every child the opportunity to contribute to an Internet record of their local communities. Schools will be asked to prepare pictures, words, photos, interviews and poems to reflect local life.

TICKET SALES: Millennium Exhibition tickets will be sold through the National Lottery network, Camelot said yesterday.

The 12 million people expected to attend will be able to buy tickets to get into the dome from National Lottery terminals throughout the country.

E-MAIL ADDRESS: Everyone in Britain will have access to a free e-mail address to mark the millennium, Sir Peter Bonfield, BT's chief executive, said yesterday. BT wanted to make a contribution that had the potential to touch the lives of the whole country.

BAA SUPPORT: THE British Airports Authority's yesterday pledged its support for the Millennium Dome. In addition, it is putting up cash for the nationwide Millennium Youth Games, with the English Sports Council.

Anger over parade body

A

'If the Millennium Dome is a success it will never be forgotten. If it is a failure we will never be forgiven'

in a circle around a central piazza.

DREAMSCAPE Billed as a roller-coaster rather than roller-coaster, it will take visitors on a six-minute ride through tunnels and four distinct environments. They will sit in giant "beds" floating along a river.

Simon Taping, one of the designers of the zone, said: "It started off with the idea of rest. There will be so much stimulation the rest of the dome it seemed obvious to have a place that would be physically relaxing as well as letting you unwind."

THE LIVING ISLAND Features a typical seaside resort with a difference. Designed by Tim Pyne at the WORK group, the zone aims to combine the fun of a traditional day out at the seaside with an awareness of the environmental cost of leisure.

"This is a zone where kids take control and engage in environmental issues," Mr Pyne said. "It's all to do with the idea that it looks great from a distance but when you get up close you see there are problems." He revealed that Christian, the eight-year-old boy given the task of advising designers about what children wanted to see in the dome, has been closely involved in testing the island.

THE SPIRIT LEVEL Incorporates a giant transparent structure and a mirrored walkway in an attempt to explore "values that underpin our society and how they

Sexless Body Zone will keep us guessing until 2000

AMID the revelations, the question that everybody was asking went unanswered yesterday, writes Dan Glatzer.

The giant human figure, sitting upright, hands on one knee, one leg outstretched, remains androgynous. "I'm going to keep you guessing," said the New Millennium Experience Company's chief executive, Jennie Page. Some surprises had to be saved for the opening night, she said.

Regardless of whether or not it has signed bits, the figure, designed by the communications company HPI/C&A, should prove the most startling of the dome's contents.

Stretching 175 ft to the

congratulations. You've just started a low cost mortgage.

Raging De Niro KOs France

Jon Hervey in Paris

ROBERT DE NIRO, interrogated by Paris police for nine hours earlier this month about his possible connections with a high-class international call-girl ring, said yesterday that he was so angry that he would never again set foot in France.

"I am way beyond what you'd call furious," he told *Le Monde* newspaper. "I will never come back to France. I will advise my friends not to come to France. I couldn't give a damn about the Cannes film festival."

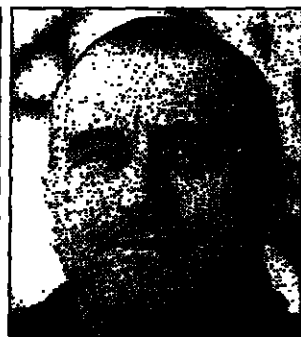
He said he would return the Légion d'honneur medal, awarded at last year's Cannes festival for his services to the film industry, to the French

embassy "as soon as I can". "I don't see any reason why I should hang on to that thing, which comes from a country which flouts its own motto of liberty, equality and fraternity."

De Niro had been in France intermittently since October, shooting scenes for a John Frankenheimer film, *Ronin*, when he was picked up at his Paris hotel on February 10.

He was interviewed as a witness by six police officers and an examining magistrate, Frédéric N'Guyen. Mr N'Guyen is heading the investigation into a \$5,000-a-night call-girl ring for the international internet allegedly run by a former Swedish model and a French soft-porn photographer.

Well-known people questioned by the judge include the former Polish tennis star Wojtek Fibak and Alain



'I knew one and I had met two of them. But had I paid for them? I have never paid for a woman in my life'

Sarda, a French film producer. Mr N'Guyen has said he would like to interview Brigitte Nielsen, the former wife of Sylvester Stallone.

De Niro denied all knowledge of the ring. "They had no charge against me whatsoever," he said. "They wanted too show me

photos of young women and see if I knew them. Yes, I knew one and I had met two of them."

"But had I paid for them? I have never paid for a woman in my life. And even if I had, it wouldn't be a crime."

De Niro, best known for his roles in *Raging Bull* and *Taxi*

Driver, which won the best film award at Cannes in 1976, said he was told his name had been found in the diary of one of the suspects.

"I had been seen in a villa," he said. "So what? I can spend hours in a villa, meet people, exchange phone numbers, it's part of normal life."

His lawyer, Georges Kleiman, has lodged a formal complaint against the judge for "violation of secrecy in an investigation" and "obstruction of freedom of movement". De Niro said the judge had clearly abused his authority.

"The judge was cold... I think he was hostile to me from the start. Nine hours of interrogation to try and tie me in with other people's problems. I don't know what his problem is, but he really has one. He talks about rich

and famous people like he's obsessed. He sees himself as the saviour of badly treated girls."

"Even the police seemed embarrassed by his way of doing things."

News of the 54-year-old actor's questioning spread rapidly and he was greeted by hordes of photographers as he left the court house.

He said his pregnant wife and his mother, who has a heart condition, had suffered equally from the publicity. "I've been forced to explain to my family that I'm the innocent victim, but there is always that bad saying 'where there's a smoke, there's a fire'."

He added: "France is known for being a land of liberty. It was to France that the filmmakers who were victims of McCarthyism came to take refuge. Not to be harassed."

News in brief

Starr summons Clinton allies

PROSECUTOR Kenneth Starr yesterday summoned a White House aide and a private investigator retained by President Clinton's lawyers to the court-house where a grand jury is investigating the White House sex scandal.

Escalating a nasty legal fight with the Clinton camp, Mr Starr subpoenaed a White House communications adviser, Sidney Blumenthal, and a private investigator, Terry Lintner, to apparently question them about anti-prosecution mud-slinging.

Mr Starr, who is investigating allegations that President Clinton had an affair with a former White House intern, Monica Lewinsky, and urged her to lie about it, is amply aware of efforts to spread damaging information about his team and believes it may be obstruction of justice, sources said. — *Reuters, Washington*.

Mr Netanyahu accepted the resignation, although Mr Yatom will stay on until a replacement is appointed. Mr Yatom had been expected to go quietly later this year, allowing him to preserve some dignity. — *David Sharrock, Jerusalem*.

Mr Netanyahu accepted the resignation, although Mr Yatom will stay on until a replacement is appointed. Mr Yatom had been expected to go quietly later this year, allowing him to preserve some dignity. — *David Sharrock, Jerusalem*.

Mossad boss resigns

THE chief of Mossad, Israel's external intelligence agency, tendered his resignation yesterday less than a week after being criticised in an official report on a failed bid to assassinate an Islamic political leader in Jordan.

Danny Yatom submitted his resignation to the prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, but strongly objected to the report's conclusions, which said he bore "a heavy responsibility" for the bungled attempt to kill a Hamas official, Khalid Meshal, in Amman last September.

Mr Netanyahu accepted the resignation, although Mr Yatom will stay on until a replacement is appointed. Mr Yatom had been expected to go quietly later this year, allowing him to preserve some dignity. — *David Sharrock, Jerusalem*.

Virtue replaces Welfare

TURKEY'S Islamists yesterday relaunched their cause under a new banner after their flagship Welfare Party was outlawed by the constitutional court. More than 100 former Welfare deputies joined the Virtue Party, which was to inaugurate its parliamentary life at a meeting in a chamber of the national assembly.

Turkey froze the bank accounts of the Virtue Party yesterday after sealing its headquarters in the final stage of dissolving the party, the official gazette said. — *Reuters, Ankara*.

Refugees flee Sierra Leone

ABOUT 1,000 refugees a day are fleeing Sierra Leone's war on foot into neighbouring Liberia, the United Nations refugee agency said yesterday.

A spokesman, Paul Stromberg, said the refugees were fleeing fighting in the eastern Sierra Leone towns of Bonai Kutanua between troops loyal to the military junta ousted from the capital Freetown a week ago and the Nigerian-led Economic force. About 14,000 Sierra Leone refugees had arrived in Liberia this month, he said. — *Reuters, Geneva*.

Georgian hostages party

ON THE sixth day of a hostage stand-off in Georgia, television footage yesterday showed kidnappers and their three UN captives sharing food, wine and jokes in the western village of Dzikhskhari while negotiators worked toward high-level talks to resolve the crisis.

In Moscow, the foreign ministry called in Georgia's ambassador on Monday to protest about suggestions that certain forces in Russia were behind an assassination attempt against Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze on February 6.

The kidnappers, supporters of the late former president Zviad Gamsakhurdia, are demanding negotiations with Georgian leaders and the release of seven comrades arrested in connection with the attack on Mr Shevardnadze. — *Reuters, Dzikhskhari*.

Whites whip black pupils

POLICE used stun grenades yesterday to restore calm in the small South African town of Vryburg after whip-wielding white parents assaulted black pupils at a school, a police spokesman said.

The white parents, carrying long whips known as jasmoks, had stopped a few dozen black children entering Vryburg High School, which until last year was reserved for white only.

Black youths in a township near the northern town later stoned a police vehicle as it took black pupils home and set another patrol car alight, the spokesman said. — *Reuters, Cape Town*.

Troops march on Tamil town

THOUSANDS of Sri Lankan troops yesterday began advancing under artillery and air cover towards a key northern town held by Tamil Tiger rebels, military officials said.

Mankulam is the last big town held by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam on a highway the military has been trying to capture during a 10-month campaign, the officials said.

Tamil suicide squads attacked a navy convoy off the northern Jaffna Peninsula and sank two ships carrying soldiers and sailors on Sunday. The defence ministry said that 61 soldiers and sailors had been rescued by late Monday. — *Reuters, Colombo*.

Playpens for pigs fall flat

A LIBERAL MP seeking re-election to the Danish parliament has said the country's 11 million pigs — twice the human population — should be given toys to play with.

The opposition Liberal Party has its roots in Denmark's farming community but Mariann Fischer Boels's reform plans, which include rubber balls to keep pigs active, washing facilities, clean bedding and a ban on growth hormones, have failed to garner support from the party leadership. — *Reuters, Copenhagen*.

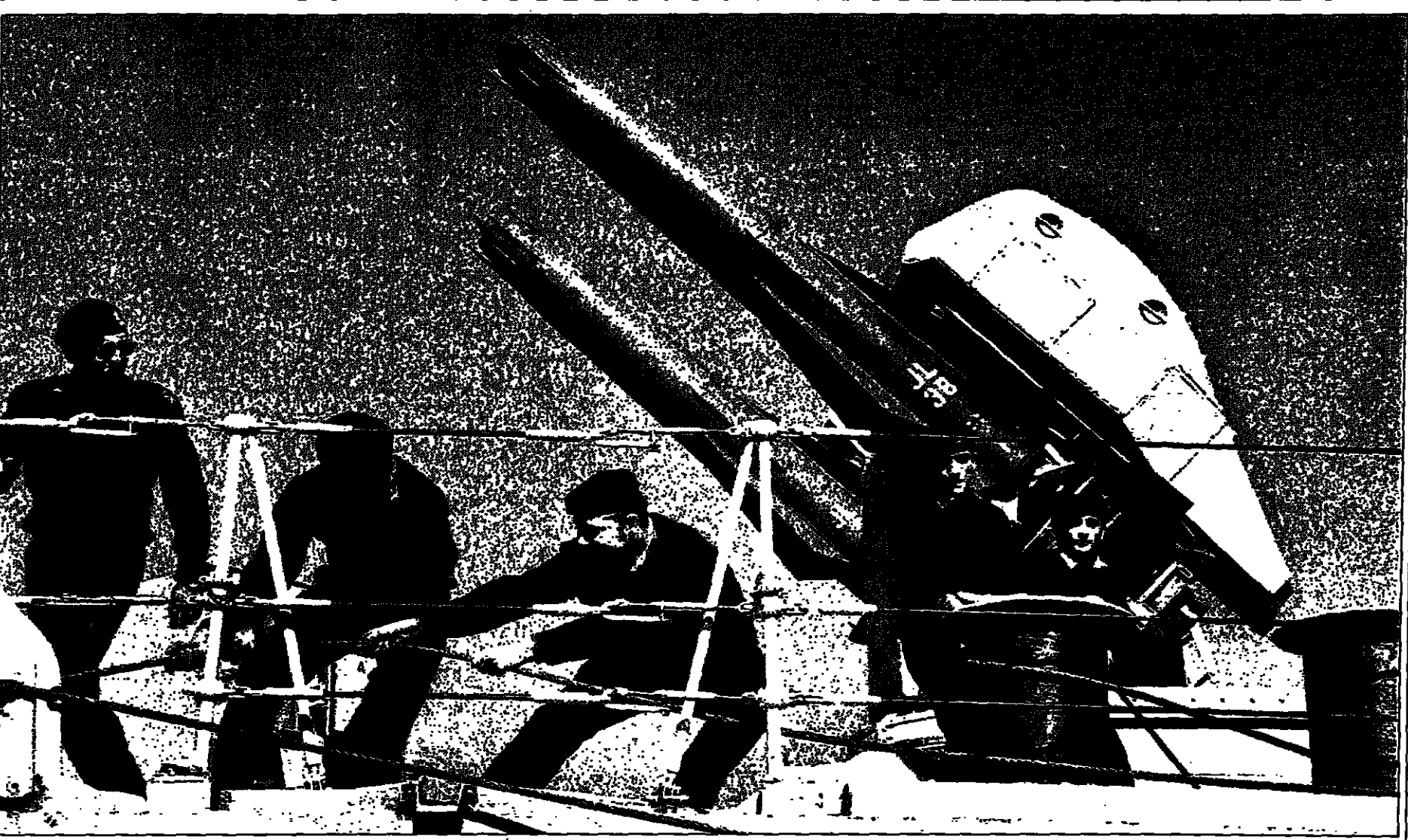
Clearout at the palace

A WORKER at the South Korean presidential palace removes a picture of Kim Young-sam yesterday, the last day of his five-year term.

His successor, Kim Dae-jung, inherits a stricken economy when he takes over as president today. His blueprint emphasises free market principles to lead the country out of the crisis. — *Reuters, Seoul*.

Manzoni once signed Umberto Eco's wrist with indelible ink, rendering him a living work of art. Eco didn't wash his arm for weeks. The ink won't off, but Manzoni's aura never did.

Arts, G2 page 8



British sailors in front of Twin Sea Dart surface-to-air missiles dock the guided missile destroyer HMS Nottingham at Kuwait's Shuwaik port

PHOTOGRAPH: STEPHANIE MOGENSEN

US forces may be camped around Gulf for good

David Fairhall, Defence Correspondent

THE strategic price Saddam Hussein may pay for avoiding air strikes could be a vast American expeditionary force permanently camped around Iraq, alert for any sign that he is reneging on his promises to the United Nations or threatening his neighbours, defence sources said yesterday.

With United States troops still pouring into Kuwait, US officials warned that longer term deployments throughout

the Gulf will have to be reconsidered. Otherwise Washington risks having to rush forces halfway round the world every time the Iraqi leader chooses to ratchet up the tension.

"As part of the ongoing review of our Iraqi policy," said a senior official, "I expect we will look at means of enhancing our ability to project power into the region."

Britain faces a similar decision. But given its much smaller resources, defence sources in London hinted yesterday it would more likely make a virtue of necessity —

by only deploying forces in response to a fresh crisis. Until it is clear whether President Saddam intends to keep his promises about unrestricted access for UN weapons inspectors, British forces will remain in the Gulf.

The Tornado squadron based at Ali Al-Salm in Kuwait (unlike the squadrons previously patrolling Iraq from Saudi Arabia and Turkey) is part of Britain's rapid deployment forces, always ready to deploy overseas at 48 hours notice. HMS Illustrious could return to the Mediterranean and still be only 10 days sailing from the Gulf.

At one point this year the

US had three aircraft carriers in the Gulf, though this was a strictly temporary overlap. Since the end of the 1991 Gulf war, when Washington signed a variety of defence co-operation agreements with Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, Oman and Saudi Arabia, it has had some combat aircraft permanently in the region, one carrier usually on station, and ground troops almost continuously on training exercises. This presence may be further strengthened.

But even US assets are not unlimited. Earlier this month General John Tiltell, who

commanded American forces on the Korean peninsula, is reported to have warned in a confidential memorandum that the diversion of naval and air force units to the Gulf, plus the deployment of Patriot air defence missiles to Kuwait, had weakened his ability to defend against a surprise North Korean attack. Even in Europe, one US commander complained he had not expected his Mediterranean forces to be depleted for "five or six weeks".

Leader comment and letters, page 9

War fervour puts Blair in EU freezer

Martin Walker in Brussels finds ominous signs that Britain's partners are denying it a place at the international top table

BITAIN has agreed to push a much firmer European line against Israel, promising that there will be "no double standards" in the way Israel and Iraq are expected to obey United Nations resolutions.

The policy is part of its effort to fend off European criticism of its role in the military build-up against Iraq.

The resentment — Britain was accused by the Dutch foreign minister, Hans van Mierlo, of neglecting its duties as president of the EU Council in its determination to win favour with Washington — has been only partially eased by the resolution of the Iraq crisis.

This week's communiqué from the EU foreign ministers, which said that securing an agreement "was only possible because of the firm resolve shown by the United Nations and the international community", did not go nearly as far as Robin Cook wanted in endorsing Britain's tough stand.

"The fact is that most Europeans countries wanted a diplomatic solution, and it was France which acted as the real EU president in urging diplomacy and the Kofi Annan

mission, while Britain reverted to its familiar role as America's best friend," a senior EU diplomat said privately yesterday.

Despite the Foreign Secretary's best efforts to use the presidency to show Britain's new commitment to Europe, there are ominous signs that London is being excluded from the top table. President Jacques Chirac of France and Chancellor Helmut Kohl of Germany met Polish leaders in Warsaw last week and promised their best efforts to speed Poland's EU membership, without Britain.

Britain's not-quite European status will be even more evident next month when President Chirac and Mr Kohl hold their first tripartite summit with Russia, without Tony Blair.

British officials insist that their six-month stint in the presidency is going well, attracting praise from other EU members, and laying a firm foundation for the policy of "putting Britain at the heart of Europe".

In reality, on the issues where progress is measurable, the presidency has been marked by disappointment, both at the endless delays in lifting the ban on British beef and on the far more serious long-term

issue of Britain's role in economic policy-making once the euro is launched.

In the past few days some of the Chancellor, Gordon Brown's darkest fears about the new Euro-X group, of which Britain is not a member, have started to come true.

France proposed last week that Austria should be allowed to start chairing the first meetings of the Euro-X group, months before Britain's presidency runs out in July.

Britain will be unavoidably embarrassed by the separate meetings of the Euro-X group once monetary union is launched at the summit on May 2-3. As a euro-member and next holder of the presidency, Austria says it is willing to chair the first Euro-X group meetings thereafter.

But the French finance minister, Dominique

Strauss-Kahn, said last week: "It may even be before that."

The problem for Britain is more than symbolic. The fact that Euro-X is already developing its own working arrangements is giving political momentum to the notion in Paris, Bonn and Washington that the G7 summits should be replaced by a G3 — the US, Japan and the Euro block. Britain's exclusion could humiliate Mr Blair's government.

It remains to be seen how far Britain will lean on Israel to get the Middle East peace process back on track.

There was a series of demands at the foreign ministers' meeting for "more determined language to be addressed to those blocking the process".

Mr Cook is sympathetic, but wants to avoid the impression that Britain is being forced to choose between its American allies and its European partners, particularly when EMU makes exclusion from Europe's inner circle so costly.

But the contrast between Mr Blair's passionately pro-Clinton summit in Washington and his absence from next month's Franco-German-Russian summit underlines Mr Van Mierlo's warning that Britain "has big problems in meeting its obligations as an EU member".

Russia cashes in on peace

Tom Whitehouse in Moscow

THE Russian government, presenting Kofi Annan's agreement with Iraq as a victory for Kremlin diplomacy, began yesterday to capitalise on its higher diplomatic profile in the Middle East.

The focus of interest for the Russian nuclear energy and oil industries is the business opportunities the deal presents. With an end to UN sanctions on Iraq now being considered, the estimated \$10 billion worth of contracts that Russian companies have signed to develop Saddam's depleted oil fields are more than pipe dreams.

"Many things are now promised to Russia, including invitations to begin oil exploration, and paying off Soviet-era debts worth \$8-12 billion," said Sergei Kazyonov, of Moscow's Institute of National Security and Strategic Studies.

Russian oil companies have bought most of the oil Iraq has been permitted to export under its "oil for food" deal and they stand to benefit most from the UN decision to raise Saddam's permitted oil exports from \$2 billion (\$1.3 billion) to \$5.2 billion (\$2.2 billion).

This new resolution has made available additional op-

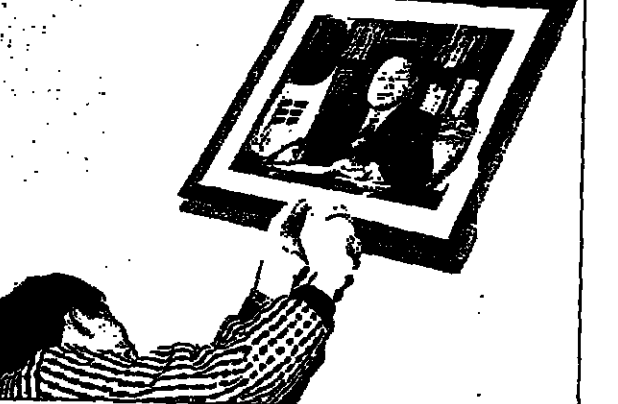
portunities for broadening Russian companies' participation in purchasing Iraqi oil, where they are already playing a leading role, and in supplying humanitarian aid to Iraq," said foreign ministry spokesman Gennady Tarasov.

Russia's opposition to military action against Iraq is paying other dividends. Further Russian involvement in Iran's nuclear power sector will be on the agenda at talks in Moscow today between Iran's foreign minister, Kamal Kharrazi, and Russia's Yevgeny Primakov.

Last Saturday, nuclear energy minister Viktor Mikhailov confirmed Russia's \$700 million contract to build a 1,000MW light-water reactor at Bushehr on Iran's Persian Gulf coast, despite US and Israeli fears that Iran could use the power station as cover for a nuclear missile project.

In Syria, too, Russia's nuclear energy ministry is set to provide equipment and expertise in a deal announced last Sunday.

Russia's enhanced Middle East profile may be seen as a vindication of Mr Primakov's diplomacy. Though presented in US media as a Saddam stooge, it was Mr Primakov, at Kofi Annan's request, who persuaded Saddam to back down from insisting on a time limit to inspections of his "presidential sites".



A WORKER at the South Korean presidential palace removes a picture of Kim Young-sam yesterday, the last day of his five-year term.

His successor, Kim Dae-jung, inherits a stricken economy when he takes over as president today. His blueprint emphasises free market principles to lead the country out of the crisis. — *Reuters, Seoul*.

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Arts, G2 page 8

The Co
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lan Traynor

Battle fo
crimes c

Moscow mayor
dog-killer claims

Tom Whitehouse in Moscow

YURI Luzhkov, Moscow's mayor who is tipped to succeed Boris Yeltsin as president, has gone to court to refute accusations from Brigitte Bardot that he ordered the "extermination" of the city's burgeoning canine homeless.

In a letter to the newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, the former French film star turned animal rights activist, she accused Mr Luzhkov of "defiling" stray dogs from Luzhkov.

Mr Luzhkov is demanding a retrial and full apology. His lawyer, Marek Gofrow, said at the first court hearing last week: "This is an outrageous slur on the mayor's character. There are no grounds what-

'The Colditz myth is historic, we can't just let it fall down'

The cash-strapped government of Saxony has greater priorities than to cultivate a British wartime legend. So it's yours for a mark, if you can afford the repairs. Ian Traynor takes a look round



Bernard Hepton played the commandant in TV's Colditz

IT HAS housed princes and paupers and seen better days as a lunatic asylum, a hospital and an old folks' home. German communists berated their wealthy enemies into its draughty halls in the 1940s. Fascists tortured their political foes here in the 1930s.

But it is as Oflag IVc that Colditz castle has been immortalised in books, films, and television series — as the sinister, impenetrable fortress where during the second world war the "bad boys" of the British officer caste plotted their escapes and carried out their extraordinary feats of derring-do.

Now the castle, derelict and decaying, is going for a single German mark. If you have 35p to spare, the legendary fortress can be yours. The catch is that you will need at least another DM100 million (25 million) for restoration.

"You can have it for a mark. But you need a solid concept for investment, repairs, and jobs," says Manfred Gergs, castle manager and head of the Colditz Castle Society. "Despite all our attempts since 1990, there are absolutely no investors."

"Enter at your own risk," warns a sign over the door. And little wonder. Crumbling masonry, damp, rot, and decades of neglect under the East German regime have turned into a huge liability what should be a big asset to the small town which shares its name.

The castle, all 700 rooms, is unused, most of it a hazardous no-go area. The splendid Renaissance chapel from where French prisoners tunneled deep into the earth in a futile escape bid is dirty and damp, strewn with rubble.

"I'm ashamed of the state of the chapel," says Manfred Heinz, the mayor. The attic, from where British officers hoped to drift to freedom by launching a glider constructed from bed timber and linen, are more forbidding now than in 1940-45, when 1,500 Allied officers were incarcerated here after escaping from POW camps elsewhere in Germany.

The Boy's Own bravado of the Nazis believed that there was no escape from Colditz. But only a tenth of the escape attempts succeeded, with 31 Allied officers fleeing the brooding castle which lords it over the small Saxon town.

In all, 11 British officers got away, including the late Sir David Neave, murdered in 1975 by the IRA. "No one who has not known the pain of imprisonment can understand the meaning of liberty," his words from 1953, his words from 1953, his words from 1953.

"The British were bettered by the French, 12 of whom escaped, but it is the British Mr Heinz is keen to bring in to salvage his castle.

"The former prisoners can't save Colditz. They can't raise the money. But it's their task

to develop a strategy together with us on what should be done so that the Colditz story doesn't die."

He wants to see restaurants, cafes, a hotel, a conference centre, offices and shops set up inside the ramparts. "It can't exist just as a museum."

Of the 10,000 tourists drawn to the castle every year, most are Britons.

They can inspect the dories and graffiti still visible on the walls of the solitary confinement cells, and marvel at the ingenious escape aids improvised by the captives — signalling instruments fashioned from mousetraps, keys made from tins and cameras conjured from spectacle lenses.

"Colditz is much better known in England than in Germany," says Mr Gergs. "There are almost a thousand castles in Saxony so this is not the most important thing for the government."

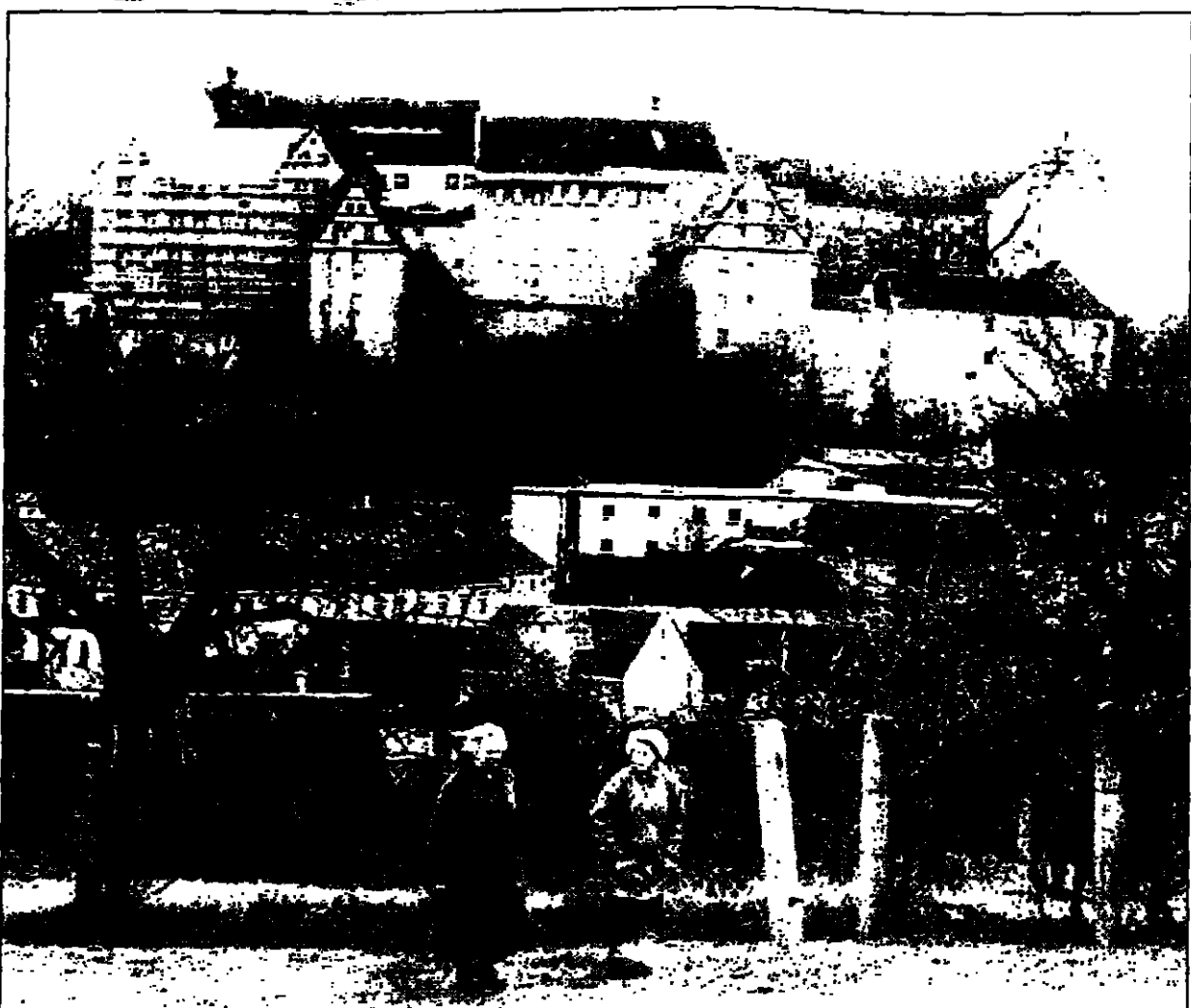
The state of Saxony owns the castle and is keen to get rid of it. But although the British Legion has recently voiced sympathy for the Sax-

ons' plight, British veterans grouped in the Colditz Association are contemptuous of the German fundraising campaign. The association boycotted events here three years ago to mark the 50th anniversary of the end of the war.

"It was a big problem," says Mr Heinz. "The British thought we were trying to profit improperly from the prisoners' fates. Yet again, we were the bad Germans."

Tucked into the hills between Dresden and Leipzig, the castle, whose foundations go back almost 1,000 years and which was rebuilt twice in the 17th century after being burned down, desperately needs a new lease of life.

But the region is depressed, with at least one in five out of work. The Saxon government in Dresden has greater priorities than to cultivate a British wartime legend. "All the different countries should contribute to saving the Colditz myth because it's historic," pleads Mr Heinz. "We can't just let it fall down. If you've got the money to invest, I'll give you the mark to buy it."



Colditz castle remains an imposing sight even now, despite rotting timbers and crumbling masonry

'Death-row organs for sale in US'

Andrew Higgins in Hong Kong

AN FBI undercover operation has exposed a macabre international traffic in the organs of executed Chinese prisoners, supporting the long-standing allegation by human rights groups against the Chinese authorities, particularly the military.

China has repeatedly denied the allegation but has yet to explain the arrest in New York of two men, one reported to be a former Chinese official involved in execution, the other a doctor, in connection with the alleged sale in the United States of kidneys, corneas, livers, skin, pancreases and lungs.

Investigators say that the two, Wang Chengyong, aged 41, and Fu Xingxi, aged 34, were hawking human organs to non-smokers, unblemished young skin and other high-quality wares.

The FBI taped the pair giving a grisly sales pitch to an agent posing as a prospective customer from a dialysis centre. They wanted \$5,000 for a pair of kidneys. In a taped telephone call, Mr Wang boasted of making a 1,000 per cent profit on the deal.

"Trafficking and profiteering in human organs is ghastly, criminal conduct that imperils the most vulnerable," a federal attorney, Mary Jo White, said in New York.

In Beijing a foreign ministry spokesman said last night "such traffic does not exist inside China", adding that if it did it would be punished.

Documents showing that Mr Wang worked as a state prosecutor in the southern Chinese island of Hainan, near Hong Kong, point to direct government involvement in a trade which Beijing has dismissed as a fabrication concocted by political enemies.

Mr Wang appears in court today. If convicted, he and Mr Fu face maximum penalties of five years jail and a \$250,000 fine.

"It might sound like ludicrous 1960s CIA disinformation, but it is not, unfortunately. It is real. It is horrible," said Robin Munro, Hong Kong director of Human Rights Watch and author of a

The US case may embarrass not only China but also the European Union, which won plaudits from the Chinese foreign ministry yesterday for deciding not to co-sponsor a United Nations motion critical of China's human rights record. The ministry spokesman, Zhu Bangzao, "welcomed" the EU's inaction as "correct".

Thousands are executed each year: the exact number is a "state secret". Amnesty collected evidence of 4,367 confirmed executions in 1996.

"There is a great danger that sometimes the decision to sentence someone to death might be influenced by the need for organs to transplant," said Arlette Ladugue, an Amnesty China researcher.

"Given the conditions in which prisoners are held, it is very unlikely that they can give free and fully informed consent. They have no access to anyone outside of prison."

Most are killed with a bullet in the back of the neck, though China has begun experimenting with lethal injections. The demand for organs can influence the method of execution. Human Rights Watch has evidence of executions being botched deliberately to keep the heart beating for immediate transplant. Chinese holidays and Com-

munist Party meetings are usually preceded by a flurry of executions. A Hong Kong newspaper reported that the promise of a plentiful supply of organs at such times prompts a rush of desperate patients, most seeking kidney transplants, to the Guangzhou Military Medical University No. 1. A documentary by ABC news in the United States also implicated the military authorities.

The state prosecutor's office in which Mr Wang allegedly worked is involved in executions and is heavily staffed by former soldiers.

"We've known for several years the extent of involvement by the Chinese government and medical establishment in taking organs from executed prisoners without permission," Mr Munro said. "It is particularly disturbing that legal officials are apparently at the forefront of efforts to profit on the world market from this repugnant traffic in body organs."

Trafficking and profiteering in human organs is ghastly, criminal conduct that imperils the most vulnerable, say investigating FBI agents

1994 report, Organ Procurement and Judicial Execution in China, which details the harvesting of organs for sale. "This confirms what human rights groups have been saying for years about this utterly unethical and internationally condemned trade in organs."

China says it occasionally takes organs from executed prisoners but only with their consent. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International estimate that more than 90 per cent of kidneys transplanted in China come from the execution grounds without permission.

Battle for war crimes court

Ian Black Diplomatic Editor

BRITAIN is at odds with the United States over the status of a permanent international criminal court to try aggressors and war criminals.

Washington insists that the court should be firmly subordinated to the United Nations Security Council. With eight working weeks left to complete negotiations on setting up a court able to try a future Saddam Hussein, Pol Pot or Radovan Karadzic, European Union experts meet in London today to thrash out the details.

"We really want to put some compulsion into the process," said Tony Lloyd, Minister of State at the Foreign Office. "This is very consistent with trying to have a foreign policy with a clear ethical base."

Unlike the International Court of Justice in The Hague, the new court will hear cases against individuals as well as states, operating like the two ad-hoc tribunals for Bosnia and Rwanda. Britain says the court is needed to provide justice, deter perpetrators of future atrocities, and help victims put the past behind them, and says it should have jurisdiction over genocide, crimes

against humanity and war crimes, including rape and the recruitment of children into armed forces.

"Like all these things, there does have to be consensus and that shouldn't be the lowest common denominator," Mr Lloyd said.

Much horse-trading remains to be done before the final conference in Rome in June. Britain's toughest battle is with the US, which insists that the power to bring cases must be invested solely with the Security Council, whose five permanent members all have a veto.

Washington is resisting greater independence for fear of "frivolous" or politically-motivated prosecutions from Third World countries, which want a strong institution free of external political pressures. France has similar doubts.

Mr Lloyd insisted that these fears are groundless. Experts say the row is likely to end in a compromise put forward by Singapore, under which prosecutions can be mounted by the court subject to a Security Council objection.

● Sino-Zaric, a Bosnian Serb indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia, surrendered to peacekeeping troops without incident yesterday, a Nato spokesman said.

Moscow mayor takes Bardot's dog-killer claims to court

Tom Whitehouse in Moscow

YURI Luzhkov, Moscow's mayor who is tipped to succeed Boris Yeltsin as president, has gone to court to refute accusations from Brigitte Bardot that he ordered the "extermination" of the city's burgeoning canine homeless.

In a letter to the newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda, the former French film star accused Mr Luzhkov of ordering the "extermination" of the city's burgeoning canine homeless. Mr Luzhkov is demanding a retraction and full apology. His lawyer, Marat Gofurov, said at the first court hearing last week: "This is an outrageous slur on the mayor's character. There are no grounds what-

soever for talking about 'extermination'. The mayor respects animals and is trying to solve this problem in a humane way."

Among the dog-loving Moscow electorate, Mr Luzhkov's popularity could be seriously dented by Ms Bardot's attack.

Moscowites may applaud his deportation of homeless people from the capital, but could be less forgiving of cruelty to homeless animals. Offending a woman — and a film star — would also be bad for his image as a Russian gentleman.

"That's why we are not attacking Ms Bardot," said his lawyer. "We believe her views have been misrepresented by the paper and it is they who must apologise."

Komsomolskaya Pravda stands by its story.

Beijing boasts of 'liberated Tibet'

Paul Eckart in Beijing

CHINA yesterday hailed its 40-year control of Tibet as a victory over feudalism and branded the region's exiled leader a liar for alleging human rights abuses in his former homeland.

A report carried by the official Xinhua news agency, New Progress in Human Rights in China's Tibet Autonomous Region, offered everything from prison memoirs to data on colour television ownership to back the Chinese view of the 1950 communist takeover as the "liberation" of Tibet.

"The democratic reform carried out in Tibet in 1959 ended the history of a feudal serf system that merged religion with politics, and gave the more than one million serfs and slaves in Tibet, accounting for more than 95 per cent of the population, the right to be their own masters," the document claimed.

"The situation as regards human rights in old Tibet bears no comparison with the situation in Tibet today," it continued.

In 1959, China's army crushed the last anti-Chinese uprising in Tibet and the Dalai Lama, spiritual and temporal leader of Tibet's traditional theocracy, fled to northern India. China said on Monday that the Dalai Lama, who won the Nobel Peace Prize

in 1989 for his peaceful world campaign for more autonomy for Tibet, was the head of a "dark, savage and cruel system" and that "he fabricates sensational lies to befuddle world opinion."

China's rule had respected Tibetan spiritual beliefs and political autonomy while bringing substantial benefits to the impoverished region, the report said, citing average annual economic growth of 11.9 per cent from 1991 to 1997, 10 consecutive bumper grain harvests since 1987 and a 25.5 per cent increase of meat production since 1991. Tibet's population had more than doubled between 1959 and 1996 to 2.44 million; 95 per cent were ethnic Tibetan.

Last December, the Geneva-based International Commission of Jurists said Tibet was "under alien subjugation" and called for a United Nations-run referendum to decide the region's status. China bitterly rejected the proposal.

The report came as Beijing won a big concession from human rights critics, who often focus on Chinese rule over the restive Buddhist region. On Monday EU foreign ministers announced they would not put forward a resolution criticising China's rights record when the United Nations Commission on Human Rights meets in Geneva next month. — Reuters.



This family arrived in Katmandu, Nepal, after a three-week trek across the Himalayas with 400 other Tibetans fleeing their 'happy' homeland

Taiwan talks go back on the agenda

CHINA yesterday signalled that it could accept Taiwan's cautious terms for ending a 51-month impasse in semi-official talks, but made clear that negotiations on sovereignty remained its goal.

Taiwan's Straits Exchange Foundation said it had received a letter from its Beijing counterpart welcoming Taipei's proposal for its envoy, Koo Chen-fu, to visit the mainland to restart talks.

Taiwan's premier, Vincent Siew, and Taipei's

China policy chief, Chang King-yuh, welcomed Beijing's "positive overture". "It has been our position to resume dialogue and broaden exchanges," Koo told reporters.

The two sides have long expressed a willingness to meet, but China had been holding out for talks on sovereignty issues that have divided the two since the 1949 civil war. Beijing sees Taiwan as a renegade province.

It yesterday warned countries playing host to a senior Taiwanese official

not to harm ties with Beijing by having "official contact" with Taipei.

Taiwan's vice-president, Lien Chan, yesterday started a trip that will take him to Jordan, Lebanon, Bahrain and Malaysia, all of which have diplomatic relations with China.

Beijing's foreign ministry said that Taiwan, which has offered to help out financially stricken neighbours in South-east Asia, was trying to cash in on economic troubles to boost its own international profile. — Reuters.

Transvestite strikes a blow for equality

Nick Cumming-Bruce in Bangkok

A WEeping beauty took the battle of the sexes to the arena of one of the world's toughest sports when Thai transvestite and wannabe woman Parinya Kiatbueasha weighed in for a bout of kickboxing at Bangkok's Lumpini Stadium.

The 16-year-old, who faces up to kicks and punches in lipstick, mascara and a hairband to hold back his tresses, burst into tears on finding he was supposed to

strip naked for the weigh-in. "The rule is unacceptable. How can I strip in public?"

walled Parinya, a veteran of 22 fights in the provinces now making his bid for fame and fortune in the Thai capital. His modesty and tears won over fight officials who allowed him to weigh in wearing underwear.

Parinya told journalists he felt like a woman but wanted to be known as a great fighter. Local ring rats say the beauty can be something of a beast even in the notoriously harsh world of Thai boxing in which pugilists

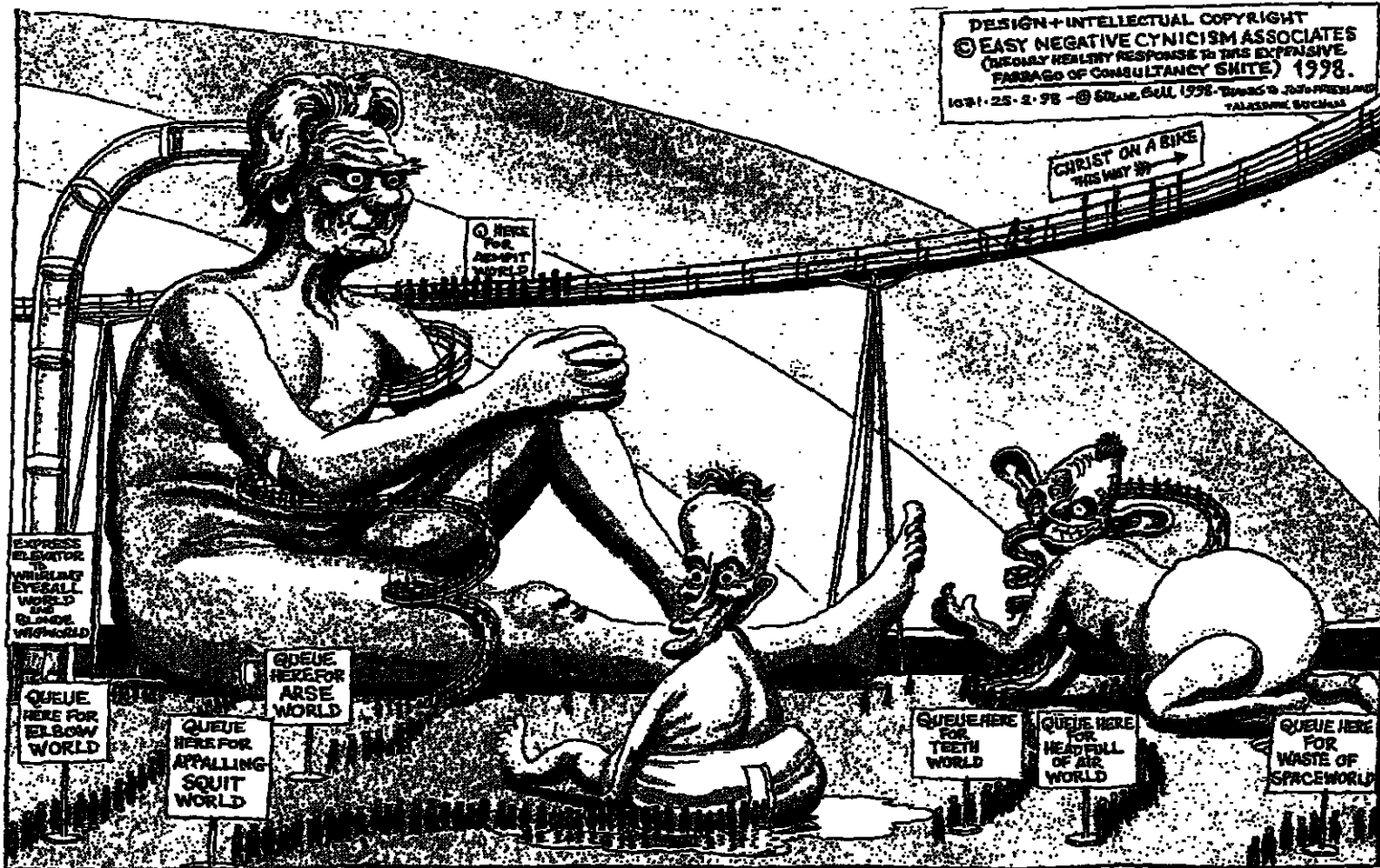
unleash elbows, knees and lightning kicks to the head.

To emphasise the point, Parinya warned his opponent not to be deceived by his fine eyes or pretty smile because "this smile has knocked out 18 boxers in 22 fights over the past two years".

His older opponent, Pongsak (the Oven) Sor Bunma, more experienced with 28 fights under his belt, gruffly dismissed any possibility of falling for the smile and promised to give Parinya a lesson "that Thai boxing is the game of a real man".

Matthew Norman

MOVING smoothly between religions, to news from Israel of an important rabbinical judgment. Bizarre magazine reports that Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, a former chief rabbi to Egypt, has ruled that it is officially acceptable to pick your nose on the Sabbath.



Don't laugh: Mandy's Dome could be a big hit with the punters

Jonathan Freedland



But such an ideal is not out of reach. Indeed, one of the 12 Millennium zones — "ukw'now" — will be dedicated to a discussion of Britishness and what the word might mean. Perhaps this will yield the outlines of an answer — an idea which could unite not just the disparate elements under the Dome, but the country itself. Now that would be a cause for celebration.

Hague's identity crisis

WILLIAM HAGUE is a man who is not like a character from Pirandello. Last night's speech at the Centre for Policy Studies, like his restructuring of party organisation, is an attempt to construct a new identity for Conservatism. The old identity of Tory party is now barely a memory. It was broken up and swept away by changes in society, many of them magnified and accelerated by the policies of Tory governments, and by the events of the 1970s and May's general election and in the public response to the death of the Princess of Wales.

Hague's task will not be easy. Like Pirandello's bemused cast of Six characters in *In Search Of An Author*, who find they have somehow missed the identities they once had and spend their time looking vainly for new ones, he will have to find a convincing answer to the only question that really matters: what is his party for? But there is some consolation in

The Tory dilemma is stark. William Hague has staked his future on reconstructing the Conservatives as a thoroughly European party. Yet he has heard nothing more of the liberal social attitudes that Michael Portillo signalled at the Tory party conference. But making hostility to Europe the *raison d'être* of New Toryism is hugely risky. The electorate will not share the Tory's own observations on Hague's constituencies and shadow cabinet. Presumably John Redwood made his embarrassing hostile remarks about Chancellor Kohl in the belief that he was echoing the sentiments of the silent majority. But most British voters are not silent. They are too astute to Europe. They are suspicious of Europe.

vacism reminds the voters that the Tory party is still unchangeable. It highlights the fact that the Conservative Party will continue to be unacceptable until the European question has been settled.

Hague's strategy shows how completely the political agenda has been taken over by Tony Blair. But it also illuminates the Government's policy of 'no alternative'. The Labour was constructed in a political environment that had been shaped and dominated for nearly 20 years by Thatcherite Conservatism. In opposition Blair was able to assemble a far-flung coalition held together by the project of 'no alternative'. Now that the Tories have all but disappeared as a political force, what does Labour stand

A centre-left coalition of the kind that Blair seems set on will be durable only if it stands for something more than an economic orthodoxy which it shares with the Tories. Aside from constitutional and perhaps electoral reform, there are as yet few

drift because it has shed an old identity and failed to find a new one. So long as it remains too timid to follow the lead given by the voters it will look in vain.

John Gray is Professor of European thought at the LSE

A victory for children

Polly Toynbee



...ent. Your's sincerely, Peter."
Harriet Harman wriggled:
"Dear Peter, by using money
on a windfall levy on the
cess profits of the priva-
cess utilities we will get
...0,000 under-25-year-olds off
...neft and into work ... A
...bour government will in-
...it a social security system
...ich you and your govern-
...ment have made expensive
...taxpayers and degrading
...claimants. We will have to
...art work immediately on
...aking the system fairer."
...s sincerely, Harriet."

...so she didn't say yes and
...didn't say no. When these
...thers appeared, I asked her
...the record if she would im-
...ment the lone-parent cuts.

Single parents on income support will get the money restored

What's more, she now has dramatic new figures showing that for the first time this decade the number of single parents on benefit is falling — as she predicted following her letter to Lilley. Part of the credit goes to her lone-parent initiative, with a campaign showing them how much better off they can be in work. The mood is already changing: restoring the lone parent cuts will encourage that trend. (But firing Harman would be *ret. like*.)



The Guardian

**The show
on the road**

Letters to the Editor

Sadda

Mark Steel

“**F**IGHT AND FIGHT
FIGHT FIGHT
FIGHT FIGHT
FIGHT FIGHT

... support

Private clubs continue to discriminate against women, but the tide is turning. In 1996 the Oxford and Cambridge Club, a social society, admitted full women members and the Dublin Fitzwilliam Tennis Club decided that "ladies" could join for the first time in its 120-year history. Last year, the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra agreed that women could cope with playing Wagner. But the ridiculousness of these institutions — parochial and stuck in another era — is magnified when applied to the home of English cricket. The MCC is no two-penny village pavilion — it is the grandest cricket club there is, with a responsibility to represent the sport. If cricket wants to recover its place as a national sport rather than a class game, the MCC must make the changes that the rest of Britain has long ago. If cricket wants to face the future, it must let "the ladies" into Lord's.

the fleet stays until he goes into a chemists and asks for 50 raspberry flavoured condoms? And Blair suggests that Saddam is made to do a turn as Jimmy Osmond on *Stars in Their Eyes*.

But the irony is that Blair looks as if he's trying to learn from Saddam's tactics. Faced with the overwhelming force of retired colonels in red jackets and the Daily Telegraph, he's preparing to bow to the inevitable and scrap his lethal plans for a bill on fox-hunting.

But he'll probably have to allow any member of the aristocracy to inspect any policy they like without prior notice, to ensure he retains no facilities for annoying the nobility in the future. But, being the cunning sort he is, as he signs the deal, he'll say "Victory to the fox" in Arabic.

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Fred Evans
Top of
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class
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Wednesday February 25 1998

Latest adventure at bookstore, page 12

Number crunchers under the thumb, page 12

Financial Editor: Alex Brummer
Telephone: 0171-239-9610
Fax: 0171-833-4456

FinanceGuardian

NatWest profits on slide

Julia Finch

THE full extent of the troubles within NatWest emerged yesterday as the bank revealed an annual profit decline in the first half of the year, a tense atmosphere in the boardroom emerged.

The bank made £1 billion, down from £1.2 billion last year, while analysts had expected up to £1.4 billion.

It was NatWest's worst performance since 1993, when the bank was still battered by the effects of the recession. Chief executive Derek Wan-

less said it had been "a very tough year", and chairman Lord Alexander confessed the results were "poor". But one institutional shareholder said the time had come for a change of face in the source close to the boardroom. Lord Alexander and Mr Wan-

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Notebook

Cost of failing to swallow tablets



Alex Brummer

THE aborted Glaxo Wellcome/SmithKline Beecham merger has left a bitter aftertaste and not just on the stock market where investors in both companies have been punished because of the perceived hubris of the executive leadership.

The takeover authorities encourage the earliest disclosure of merger talks and the maximum amount of information for investors as soon as is practicable. But this is not an excuse for cavalierly announcing merger terms and management line-up without recognising the problems which both Sir Richard Sykes of Glaxo and Jan Leschly of SmithKline have done.

Of the two chief executives, Mr Leschly would appear to come out worse. He has twice put his company in play, allowed the shares to soar on the back of it, and been forced into a humiliating retreat.

There are some murmurs about this among institutional shareholders, but probably not enough to dislodge a chief executive who, in terms of results, actually delivered a better performance than Glaxo Wellcome in 1997. The latter is still struggling to fill the huge hole created by the end of the Zantac patent.

Much of the bitterness emerging over why the merger failed has come from the SmithKline Beecham camp, with the underlying plot being the impossibility of two super-egos such as Sir Richard and Jan Leschly being able to work together.

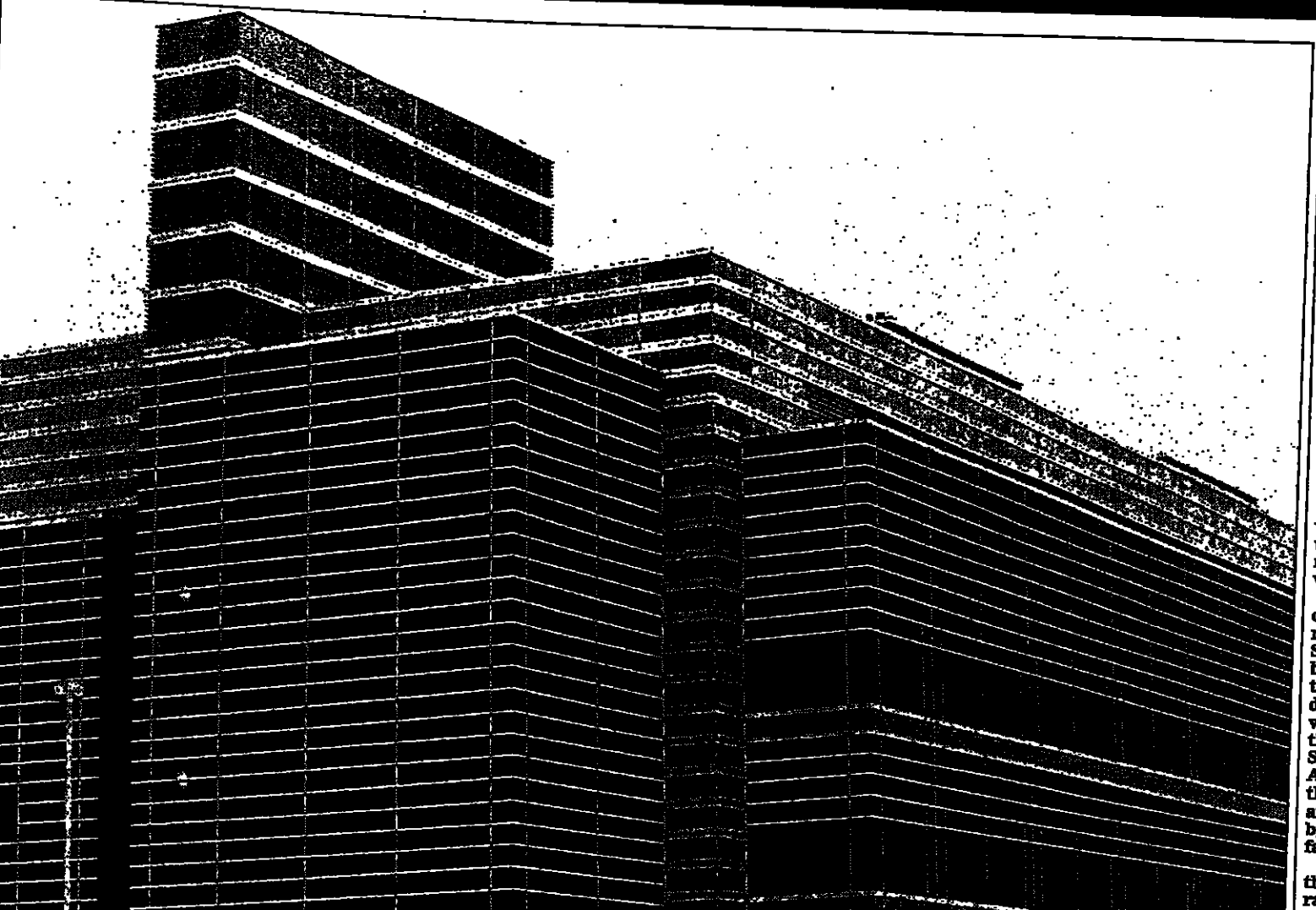
The failure has also raised questions as to whether it is sensible for Sir Richard to steer Glaxo any longer, without the watchful eye of a powerful independent chairman.

The assumption is that SmithKline, because it is only just in the top 10 ethical drug companies, needs a merger more than Glaxo Wellcome. SKB has made enormous strides in the area of gene-identifying technology, identifying hundreds of pharmaceutical development targets for the next century. But it is an expensive business and the resources inside Glaxo Wellcome, would have made all that more possible.

There is a sneaking suspicion that it may still happen. Glaxo Wellcome's studios suggest that Sir Richard and his advisers might be plotting a return match. A hostile bid on the scale envisaged would be a novelty. But that also was the case when Glaxo moved on Wellcome.

Bank futures
BY NOW after a year of setbacks and drama at NatWest, including the reinforcement of the board with the appointment of a

Chemical reaction



Missed target... SmithKline Beecham's research establishment in Harlow, Essex

Cases of the jilters

Dan Atkinson

STEP forward Telecom & Wireless, super-markets group Asda-Way and the Barco West Banking Group. All differ-

ent groupings struggling under a common handicap. They do not exist.

These are the huge combines that never were, the "world-class players" that would fly the flag, take on the American and Japanese, and put Britain back where it belongs.

Now this rapidly growing club has welcomed its newest member: Glaxo SmithKline, the multi-billion-pound marriage that was called off on Monday night. The new member will spot one friendly face in the clubhouse, that of SmithKline Beecham.

American Home Products, the transatlantic drugs alliance which was terminated by SKB earlier this year in favour of the Glaxo "deal".

This has become something of a habit in the corporate Britain of the 1990s. British Telecom has been through two duff engagements, first to follow Brit Cable & Wireless and then with America's MCI group, which ungratefully took off with a flash-barry outfit called WorldCom, all for a measly \$37 billion. Banks have paved even more promises. Glaxo had Barco than Barclays was sniffing around Standard Chartered. Meanwhile, NatWest has been linked with the Abbey National and the

Foreigners are not averse to a spot of *merger interruptus*. Volvo and Renault were to have snuggled up but didn't, and Commerzbank has been mentioned in the same breath as a string of possible partners. But the not-quite-merger is becoming a British speciality.

The law of averages suggests some of these deals ought to have gone through. And some of them have gone all the way ought not to have. British Aerospace bought car group Rover and then nationwide exorcism for allowing it to pass into foreign hands. Britain's drinks industry is routinely convulsed by huge get-togethers which are going to build the ultimate "world-class player" but never quite do.

Ending an engagement is embarrassing, but there are worse things in life than embarrassment.

Drugs industry on attack alert

Collapse of takeover talks may result in mood turning hostile, says Roger Cowe

PROSPECTS of Glaxo Wellcome mounting a hostile bid for rival drugs group SmithKline Beecham increased yesterday after the surprise collapse of their planned £120 billion merger.

This was seen in the City as one potential outcome of the failed deal but other possibilities include an assault on another drugs company, Zeneca, or a search by both thwarted partners for other takeover candidates.

Financial institutions will be demanding justifications from the leaders of both companies for their actions in frustrating the deal and losing hundreds of millions of pounds in merger benefits.

The failure is particularly embarrassing for SmithKline Beecham, which entered talks with Glaxo after abandoning a planned deal with the US company American Home Products.

Shareholders were left nursing huge losses after more than \$13 billion was wiped from the two companies' stock market values in response to news that the merger had fallen through.

One institutional investor complained that the two companies' boards should not have allowed personality clashes to prevent the deal going ahead.

"The merger obviously would have contributed to shareholder value. Management has a duty to extract value and pursue it to the bitter end," he said.

Another commented: "The deal seemed to have a lot of sense. It's a shame that cultural issues or management egos got in the way."

SmithKline announced late on Monday night that it could not go ahead with the merger, which would have created one of the world's largest companies.

The deal was unveiled at the end of January, when Glaxo stepped in to the gap

left by the failure of SmithKline's merger with American Home Products.

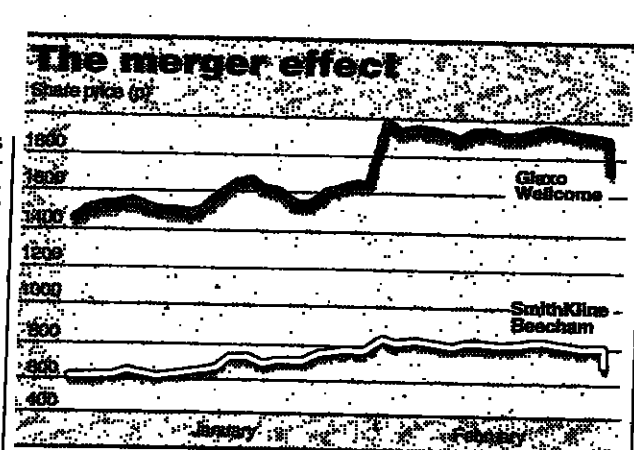
In its statement calling off the finger directly at Glaxo, saying the company's conduct of the negotiations "has inevitably strained relations between the two companies".

SmithKline said its intended partner declared on Friday that it was not prepared to go ahead on the basis originally agreed. Despite its best efforts, including talks

over the weekend between the groups' two senior non-executives, Sir Peter Walters and Sir Roger Burn, it was clear that "insurmountable differences" had arisen.

Neither side would expand on the differences, but the personalities of Sir Richard Sykes and Jan Leschly, the two leading executives, were seen as crucial to the breakdown.

One observer said SmithKline had become frustrated at Glaxo's stream of demands



Mixture that was bound to explode

Roger Cowe

IT IS easy to see why Sir Richard Sykes and Jan Leschly could not agree on how to run their merged empires. The chiefs of the two drugs groups might be described euphemistically as "powerful personalities" — demanding leaders who make unlikely co-workers.

Both are charming when they need to be but are hard taskmasters and difficult colleagues.

Mr Leschly is a former top tennis player who quit when he realised he was unlikely to get higher than number 10 in the world rankings, which he achieved in 1965.

He is determined to be number one in his chosen field and shot to the top when he moved to the drugs industry. Despite a setback when he lost out in a previous drugs merger, between Bristol Myers and Squibb in 1989, Mr Leschly bounced back.

He has been chief executive of SmithKline since 1994 and has pursued growth with a drive that prompted one rival to describe him as a "megalo-maniac".

Mr Leschly expects hard work from colleagues but is seen as impatient with challenges to his views.

These characteristics are shared by Sir Richard Sykes, the research scientist whose ascent at Glaxo resulted from a tiff between former chairman Sir Paul Girolami and his chief executive, Ernst Mario.

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Head to head... Jan Leschly, left, and Sir Richard Sykes

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Wages climb ahead of pay laws

Charlotte Denney and Mark Atkinson

LABOUR'S plan for a national minimum wage is boosting pay packets even before it is introduced, according to new research due to be published today.

Incomes Data Services — which was commissioned by the Low Pay Commission — says many companies are increasing wages now to avoid having to make a big adjustment in April 1999, when the pay floor is due to be introduced.

Firms which have recently increased their basic salaries include McDonald's, which has upped its basic rate by 12 per cent to £3.50 an hour for staff outside London and £4 for those in the capital.

Union pressure and recruitment difficulties have contributed to pushing up wages, says IDS. Public sector unions have secured deals establishing 24 as the minimum hourly rate for their members.

The report says there is no sign that better paid workers are demanding increases to maintain differentials, a common objection by employers to the minimum wage. There was also not much evidence of job losses from higher pay, another employer objection.

Trade minister Ian McCartney said the report refuted "doom-mongers" who predicted that firms would lay off workers rather than pay the national minimum wage.

The Low Pay Commission have until May to recommend a level to the Government for the minimum wage.



McDonald's staff, including those at this restaurant in Romford, Essex, have seen their wages rise. PHOTOGRAPH BY RICHARD SMITH

Coal industry unites in market lobby

Producers and unions launch campaign to halt pit closures

David Gow

Industrial Editor

COAL producers, mining unions and MPs yesterday joined forces to press the Government to stop up to eight pit closures and the loss of thousands of jobs from June by guaranteeing coal a minimum 30 per cent share of the electricity generating market.

Gas reserves could be exhausted and Britain could become a net importer soon

after the turn of the century. Professor Steve Fothergill, director of the Coalfield Communities Campaign, said: "We're not asking for support for sentimental reasons nor simply to protect jobs, but because British coal can deliver energy that is affordable, reliable, clean and secure."

Prof Fothergill said that the industry faced a shortfall of between 10 and 14 million tonnes a year from the end of June, when existing contracts with generators, extended late last year for three

months after government intervention, ran out.

"That would mean the pretty immediate closure of six or eight large collieries. If the trend towards gas continued, that would lead to another round of closures in 2000, or shortly afterwards."

"Left to itself, the free market is endangering the future of the coal industry; it could eliminate it. Once it's gone, there's no turning back. It's gone for ever," he told a Westminster meeting.

In a plan titled A Market For Coal, the campaign argues that the guaranteed minimum market for coal would provide a long-term framework, for up to 20 years,

that would justify investing in new coal reserves.

Richard Budge, chief executive of Britain's biggest coal producer, RJB Mining, told the meeting that the Government's energy review could take two years but ministers should act within two months — before current contracts run out. "We need the government to give us a lead."

He added: "We could then be producing more coal from April and have no further pit closures. We have reduced costs by 10 per cent because of the efforts of the workforce in the last three years, and if we could be guaranteed extra coal-burn over the next five years, there would be no subsidy

required, and the industry would be in a much more competitive position."

But John Redwood, the shadow trade and industry secretary, said the Government's deal to extend existing contracts with generators by three months simply encouraged buying rather than burning coal. "It means the collapse is going to be even bigger this summer."

Birth of new books chain

Julia Finch

A NEW books and records retail group will be created today when WH Smith announces the sale of its Waterstone's book chain to a newly-created company that will also include the Dillons bookshops and HMV record outlets.

The new company is backed by the United States venture capital group Advent and record giant EMI — which owns Dillons and HMV. Entrepreneur Tim Waterstone, who founded the eponymous book chain before selling out to WH Smith in 1989, is expected to be named executive chairman of the new group and together with other senior managers is understood to be investing more than £5 million in the new venture.

The new chain will also include the Daisy & Tom children's books and toys stores which belong to Mr Waterstone. WH Smith is expected to receive some £300 million for the Waterstone's chain, which made a £10 million profit in the past six months.

The sale was prompted by an audacious takeover bid for the whole of WH Smith proposed by Mr Waterstone last October. The ailing high

street giant saw off the bid before it was officially tabled but Mr Waterstone had focused minds on a new strategy at Smith's and the group, under new chief executive Richard Handover, has since decided to concentrate its efforts on its core WH Smith chain.

It has already disposed of its US record chain, The Wall, for £28 million and had drawn up plans to float Waterstone's as a separate company.

Mr Waterstone and his partners approached WH Smith before Christmas with a new plan to take over just the books chain and last night the finishing touches to the deal were being made.

There appeared to be still some debate over Mr Waterstone's role. One source close to the negotiations said he would be a "non-executive part-timer" while another said he would be working "five days a week" at the new company.

The long-term plan is for the new retail chain, which will have some 630 book and record outlets, to be floated on the stock exchange. It will be one of the biggest music, books, videos and computer game retailers in Europe.

Waterstone's has some 120 outlets, mainly in the UK and Ireland, while Dillons has nearly 80 UK outlets. HMV

has 330 stores in eight countries. There are currently two Daisy & Tom stores, in London and Manchester, although Mr Waterstone has ambitious plans for several more superstore-sized outlets in leading cities.

The entrepreneur has a reputation as a talented retailer and ideas man, but he does not have a record of running profitable ventures. But at the new company he will be flanked by two joint chief executives, Alan Giles who will run the books division and Stuart McAllister, who will head the records business.

WH Smith is now expected to start negotiations to sell its 75 per cent of the Virgin/Our Price record chain. The remaining 25 per cent belongs to Richard Branson's Virgin Group and last summer Mr Branson offered £135 million to take full control. The Virgin group has first option on any sale.

The books and records market has been facing substantial change since the ending of the net book agreement, which prevented retailers from discounting books, three years ago. Since then there has been a surge of sales through supermarkets and bookshops have been forced to target serious bookbuyers to offset discounting on best sellers.

Labour's statistical U-turn

Charlotte Denney

THE Government yesterday backed away from its manifesto commitment to an independent statistical service in the face of resistance from civil servants to greater parliamentary scrutiny.

Before the election, Labour promised to allow public control over statistics, which is subject to political interference. The party repeatedly claimed that jobs figures were "fiddled" to lower the unemployment total.

Full independence would make the Office for National Statistics (ONS) accountable to Parliament rather than the Treasury. Yesterday, however, Helen Liddell, the junior Treasury minister, unveiled a green paper which downgraded full independence to just one of four options for the

future of the service. Sources claim that ministers such as Jack Straw, the Home Secretary, who were strong supporters of a fully independent service in opposition have done a U-turn now that they are in power.

"The manifesto line has proved hard to implement once ministers realised the beauty of being in control of their own statistics," said Simon Briscoe of Nikko Bank, a member of the ONS's statistics users group.

When the green paper was first circulated in Whitehall, sources say Downing Street sent out a letter arguing that there was no need to canvass different options and that the proposal to make the ONS statistically independent should be published as a white paper.

Objections from departments which are reluctant to lose control over official sta-

tics could result in full independence falling off the agenda, however, when the consultations on what is now the green paper are considered.

Outlining the difficulties, Ms Liddell said making the ONS statistically independent would be the most expensive option, while the green paper warns that it would take up scarce parliamentary time.

Mr Briscoe said none of the other three options advanced could be described as making the ONS into an independent statistical service.

The options are: strengthening existing arrangements by delegating more responsibility away from ministers to the ONS; establishing a governing body with an independent chair and setting up an independent statistical commission to check up on the ONS.

Fixed loans may foil the Old Lady

Mark Miller

INCREASING numbers of home-buyers are switching to fixed-rate mortgages in a move which could eventually affect the way in which the Bank of England handles monetary policy.

Traditionally house-buying in Britain has been financed by variable-rate mortgages, heavily influenced by the short-term interest rates set by the Bank of England.

But with more home-buyers taking advantage of lower long-term interest rates by locking into fixed-rate mortgages the economic impact of short-term rate changes could be blunted.

"Borrowers are decoupling themselves from general interest rates, which is why the five interest-rate hikes imposed [since last May] ... have had only a modest effect," Joe Dwyer, chairman of Britain's biggest housebuilder, Wimpey, said yesterday.

Big lenders reckon between 50 and 70 per cent of new loans over the last six months are fixed for five years, says Mr Dwyer.

Yesterday some lenders were coy about the figures, but the Halifax, Britain's big-

gest mortgage provider, said that about 60 per cent of new loans were fixed, although it could not give a breakdown of the periods for which they were fixed.

"If more people are taking out fixed-rate mortgages, then monetary policy is going to be blunter," according to David Coleman, an economist at CIBC Wood Gundy.

Although changes in short-term rates would affect the cost of credit-card and other borrowings they would have much less effect on home-buyers as sales struggled to regain lost momentum.

Analysts warned that profits were unlikely to improve much this year because of the increase in sales at the expense of profit margins.

The group abandoned merger talks with ASDA in September and, though the trading news was bad, analysts thought the share price was unlikely to fall too much further because bid speculation would continue.

It is difficult to see who would be bold enough to mount a bid while the trading picture is so clouded. A Safeway spokesman denied that investors had called for Mr Smith's head, and said the group had not received

any bid approach. Mr Smith said the group had resolved the problems that formed the basis for the last profit warning in November, when Safeway could not get stock on to the shelves ahead of the important Christmas season.

The group was now on track to meet the targets on sales and savings it set in November but would need to invest an extra £40 million in the coming year to improve product availability and supply chains.

Safeway's share of the £33 billion food retail market rose 0.3 per cent in 1997, compared with rises of 1.5 per cent by Tesco and Sainsbury's and ASDA's 1 per cent increase. Small stores are continuing to lose out to the larger chains.

Competition will increase with the merger of Somerfield and Kwik Save, who said on Monday that they aim to be the number one player in the high street when they announced plans for a merger to create the country's fifth largest grocery chain.

Safeway has been hurt by the revival in the fortunes of Sainsbury's and is relying on improved service and technological innovation to keep customer loyalty and sales.

The consortium includes Deutsche Telekom, Pathe Cinema, Hewlett Packard Europe and the High Tech Centre at the Babelsberg studios in Germany. Demonstrations of the technology are due to begin in June in Ireland, Italy, France, Germany and Belgium.

However, the consortium has been unable to persuade a UK company to join, though talks are said to be continuing with Pearson.

The system will free film makers from the high costs of making hundreds of prints and delivering them around the country — the "cans to vans" system.

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Chris Barrie, Media Business Correspondent

THAT most emotive of cinema symbols, the flickering projector, will soon be history if a project backed by the European Commission is successful. Next year a consortium plans to transmit films directly to hundreds of cinema screens in a move that could revolutionise the economics of film making.

According to Aerospa-

tele, the Cyber Cinema project is close to completing the development of processes needed to scan a 35mm film, compress it in digital form, and transmit it encoded via satellite to dishes at cinemas. The cinema shows the film on high definition video projectors.

Aerospa-tele expects the system to appeal to cinemas in small towns where audiences have traditionally waited up to four months to see the latest release.

Sharon Reed, managing di-

rector of special effects firm Framstore, said the combination of digital editing and distribution would transform the economics of the film industry.

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Football

Ian Ross on a significant setback for England's World Cup options and Liverpool's championship chase

Fowler out for rest of season

ANOTHER shadow was cast over England's preparations for this summer's World Cup finals in France when Robbie Fowler was yesterday told that he would not play again this season.

The 22-year-old Liverpool striker tore medial ligaments in his left knee and sustained cartilage damage when he fell heavily after an accidental collision with Everton's Norwegian goalkeeper Thomas Myhre late in the Merseyside derby at Anfield on Monday night.

He attempted to play on as Liverpool chased a win that would have rekindled their Premiership title hopes, but was forced to limp away to the treatment room shortly before the final whistle and later left the ground on crutches.

Yesterday he was in a Drottlich clinic awaiting a specialist's opinion on what surgery he would need, and when, at first it had been feared that Fowler faced perhaps 12 months out of senior football with a cruciate ligament injury.

Happily this is not the case, but it is unlikely that Liverpool's senior goalkeeper will be able to resume even light training before midsummer, and the England coach Glenn Hoddle has been advised that Fowler will still be some way from full fitness when the World Cup opens in Paris on June 10.

"This is bitterly disappointing news for Robbie, for us and for England," said the Liverpool manager Roy Evans. "Although he has not enjoyed the best of form in recent weeks, I thought he actually looked a good deal sharper against Everton."

"He was injured trying to win the ball. It was a brave challenge but that is what I

have come to expect of him. This could hardly have come at a worse time for us because we already have a very lengthy casualty list."

Indeed, with his German international Karlheinz Riedle sidelined because of an ankle injury, Evans may well decide to move into the market to secure a replacement for Fowler before next month's annual transfer deadline.

There might be more bad news for Liverpool and England later in the week, concerning Jamie Redknapp. The midfielder has been unlucky with injuries and collected another on Monday, an ankle knock whose severity cannot be assessed fully until the swelling has gone down.

Although Fowler was omitted both from England's full and B squads for the friendly internationals against Chile this month, his consistency since establishing himself in Liverpool's first team four years ago made him a leading contender for Hoddle's 23-man squad for France.

Arsenal's Ian Wright recently had knee surgery and Tottenham Hotspur's Les Ferdinand is similarly bedeviled by injuries and inconsistent form.

The probable loss of Fowler too opens up the intriguing possibility of Hoddle offering the olive branch of reconciliation to Chris Sutton, the Blackburn Rovers forward whose international career was placed in cold storage when he refused to play in the B team against Chile after failing to win a place in the senior pool.

Other strikers who may well profit from Fowler's misfortune when Hoddle comes to order the travel tickets are Middlesbrough's Paul Merson and the Coventry City pair Dion Dublin and Darren Huckerby.



Rough on Robbie... knee and cartilage injuries mean that Fowler is unlikely to be match-fit in June

Referee ban gets the yellow card

Martin Thorpe

THE decision to ban the Premiership referee Dermot Gallagher because of poor performances has been criticised as insensitive and pointless.

The manager Arsène Wenger, whose Arsenal team were involved in the February 8 game with Chelsea for which Gallagher has been particularly censured, and Arthur Smith, secretary of the Referees' Association, both felt that the public perception of Gallagher as a referee who could put him under an intolerable situation for his return game, Manchester United v Wimbledon on March 28.

"This will certainly put extra pressure on him in his next match," said Wenger. "Suspending him for one game will not help anybody."

Smith agreed. "I am not at all in favour of this suspension. He will have a lot of pressure on him when he comes back, from the crowd and everybody. Also people will now be demanding that referees are suspended every time they make a bad decision. If they were going to suspend him they should not have made it public."

Roy Hodgson, the manager of Blackburn, whose game with Leicester on Saturday has been taken away from the Fifa-listed Gallagher, said: "He is a good referee and it does not please me to see him suspended. He would have been very welcome to referee our game."

Such support may seem odd, given the recent bout of managerial criticism of referees. But the person who implemented the ban, Ken Rid-

den, director of refereeing at the Football Association and the Premier League, said yesterday that news of the decision would have come out in the end anyway.

He said the ban, agreed by the Premier League and FA, was not implemented in response to the recent criticism of referees. The disciplinary procedure was agreed upon at the formation of the Premier League in 1992, though there had been only one similar case, which he refused to reveal.

Ridgen did confirm Gallagher had been banned for his performances in more than one match, though he called the Arsenal-Chelsea game the "combustible factor".

"Though other games were taken into consideration, we looked at the match observer's report of that match and were disappointed in the overall standard," he said. "The area we are talking about is if a referee acknowledges he's seen an incident but does not take any action as required by law."

In the game Gianluca Vialli was pulled back by Steve Bould and only booked instead of being sent off for denying what appeared a clear goalscoring opportunity. Gallagher also failed to caution a player for kicking the ball away.

Gallagher refused to comment yesterday but has been told to improve his performances. David Elleray, the Premiership referees' spokesman, said: "Everybody is saying that referees aren't accountable for their performances, and this is one way in which they are shown to be. Players get dropped if they don't perform to the correct level and so do referees."

First Division

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Asaba makes Royle suffer

Trevor Haylett

THREE goals, two in the first half, condemned Manchester City to the second defeat of their new manager's reign last night, a much better one for Joe Royle. Reading won themselves valuable breathing space but City remain in the bottom three.

Georgi Kinkladze, a multi-million-pound transfer-in, was injured but now Peter Beardsley was on hand. A Frank Clark loan signing before the latest managerial turnaround at Maine Road, Beardsley took over the play-making role and in the opening minute he slipped Uwe Rösler in for a chance that Nicky Hammond did well to keep out.

Yet when Reading went on the counter-attack the City defence appeared even more fragile and after eight minutes the home side were celebrating a goal. Carl Asaba must have been surprised at room afforded him as he gathered Jason Bowen's low pass before executing a swift turn and shot. Tommy Wright got

to the ball but could not hold it and Lee Hodges turned it over the line.

Rösler spurred two more openings before Reading scored again. First he made a wild thrust at Kiti Symons's hopeful long ball and then he aimed too high with a header from Michael Brown's cross that should really have kept down.

"These misses reminded Reading that they would need a second goal, and Ray Houghton obliged on the half hour with a purposeful strike from just inside the penalty area that did full justice to a smart build-up involving Asaba and Martin Williams.

After an hour City threw on Paul Dickov to give themselves an extra attacker, but found their best efforts confounded by a defence vigilantly marshalled by Gareth Davies and Linvoy Primus, and a late shot from Asaba compounded their misery.

Reading (4-4-2): Hammond; Booty, Evans, Primus, Lewis, Bowen, Persson, Houghton, Hodges (4-4-2): Asaba, Williams.

Scottish Premier Division: Kilmarnock 1, Rangers 1

Bjorklund in the land of nod

Patrick Glenn

RANGERS' unconvincing form continued in another messy affair at Rugby Park last night, the champions once again failing to break the deadlock.

Jonas Thern, playing a defensive role, was the probable scorer of the equaliser in the 69th minute, after Paul Wright gave the home side the lead after only 14 minutes.

Even before Wright's goal, Kilmarnock had given the champions and their follow-

ers notice that they were unlikely to be as easily subdued as in last Saturday's 4-0 defeat at Celtic Park.

Walter Smith chose a purely attacking side, with Seb Rotherham, the Chilean striker, starting a match for the first time in more than a year because of injury. Indeed, it was his first league game for Rangers.

Paul Gascoigne and Thern were recalled to midfield in place of the largely defensive Ian Ferguson and the injured Jorg Albertz, but Gascoigne lasted only 35 minutes, an injury sustained midway through the

first half having left him in obvious discomfort. However, as Joachim Bjorklund, the Kilmarnock goalkeeper Gordon Marshall's high punt bounced once, Bjorklund headed it past the advancing Andy Goram and Wright simply ran past them to catch the ball two yards from the line and slip it into the vacant net.

Rangers lost Gordon Durie to injury, to be replaced by Jonatan Johansson, and Bjorklund to the manager's displeasure — he was replaced by Tony Vidmar at the interval — before they scored their equaliser.

There had been little hint of it before Marshall failed to hold Brian Laudrup's cross from the right. The danger seemed to have passed as the ball was pushed out of the penalty area but, with Marshall still stranded, Thern clipped the ball home from 25 yards.

Kilmarnock (4-4-2): Marshall; McGlothlin, Montgomery, McGovern, Baker, North, Kelly, Hogg, McIntyre, Wright. Rangers (4-3-3): Goram; Moore, Porini, Gough, Rotherham, Gascoigne, Ferguson, Scott, Potts (2 one untried).

Referee: R. Orr (Kilmarnock).

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Laudrup admits going back on his word to join Ajax

BRIAN LAUDRUP yesterday confirmed that he had verbally agreed with the Ajax coach Morten Olsen to join the Amsterdam club before last week signing a three-year deal to move to Chelsea once Rangers' season is over.

"It's true that I gave the impression to Morten four weeks ago that I would choose Ajax," Laudrup said. "I felt under pressure to do so because I had a feeling that if I didn't act quickly the agreement [with Ajax] would fall through. I'm sorry to have disappointed him."

Olsen said: "We had an agreement with Brian. I'm very disappointed with his behaviour. There was no actual contract signed but there are several ways of making an agreement which are just as good as written ones."

Roma's 31-year-old Argentine striker Abel Balbo could be the next player to arrive at Stamford Bridge. He is available for £3 million, according to Italian press reports.

Leeds are today expected to announce that they have signed the Austria defender Martin Hiden from Rapid Vienna for around £1.5 million. Hiden, who won his first cap

Chelsea call in Uefa on official

UEA is investigating the conduct of the referee for tomorrow week's Cup Winners' Cup quarter-final between Chelsea and Real Betis and will issue a statement later today.

The official and his linesmen are reported to have attended last Sunday's Spanish league game between Betis and Espanyol and watched from the directors' box.

A Betis spokesman said that the news of the inquiry had been greeted with "surprise" by the club.

Uefa policy is that clubs should have no contact with officials appointed for their European games until the day before a match.

"We're a bit surprised by what has happened," the Betis spokesman said. "It wasn't us that invited him. We wanted to come to the game."

He added that the club had no problem with either keeping or changing the officials for the visit of Chelsea, and would be making a full statement after speaking to Uefa.

Uefa said that Chelsea had been in touch by fax asking it to look into the affair, but added that no official complaint was made by the London club.

"We have asked Uefa to look into the matter," a Chelsea spokesman confirmed.

"We will put all mechanisms as necessary in motion so that Uefa studies the matter, and they don't preclude changing the referee."

According to reports, the designated Swedish referee Leif Sundell attended Sunday's game with several colleagues who had been officiating at a pre-season tournament in the Marbella area and involving teams from Scandinavia.

Spanish TV footage seems to show Sundell chatting with Betis fans at a bar inside the Villamar stadium. His assistant Mikkel Hansen and Stefan Wittburg were also reported to be present.

According to Marca, a Spanish sports daily, the referee was "reproached" by some fans and had to put up with their jokes about the result of the forthcoming game.

Uefa, the European governing body, and Fifa, the world equivalent, have taken big steps in the past few years to show Sunday's match officials and referees that they were not to be taken for granted.

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Sport in brief

Snooker

Terry Griffiths yesterday resigned his 1998-99 year post as national director of coaching. "The continued political problems within the game make my job impossible," said the 1979 world champion, whom many feel would be an ideal candidate for chairman should Rex Williams be voted out of office in Bristol next Wednesday.

Table Tennis

Terry Young was the only English qualifier to join the England No. 1 Matthew Syed in the Qatar Open after Alex Perry and Andrew Eden wilted in the Doha heat. Young beat Nazaf Hui of Bangladesh, Mohammed Rumeih of Qatar and Denmark's No. 3 Mads Sorensen to enter the men's singles draw.

Squash

The British national champion Simon Parke is a late

replacement for the Egyptian No. 1 Ahmed Barada, who has du in the Super Series finals starting at the Galleria shopping centre in Hatfield tomorrow, writes Richard Jago.

England retain the world team title last year, joins Ed Harris, a late replacement for Canada's world No. 3 Jonathan Power.

Cross-Country

Three-times English national champion Richard Nurkhar runs in the UK Championships at Butte Park in Cardiff on Sunday in the hope of securing a place in the world championships in Marrakesh next month. He recently spent seven weeks training in Kenya. Paula Radcliffe will be absent as she is training in Albuquerque.

Bowls

"It was a brilliant performance," said England's team manager Mal Hughes after John Ottaway, Tony Alcock and Andy Thomson scored a 3-0 whitewash over Australia in Sydney yesterday to complete a clean sweep in the three-Test series.

Cricket

Richard Bernard, the Bristol doctor who played for Cambridge and Gloucestershire and was a descendant of W.G. Grace, has died aged 59, writes David Foot. As a schoolboy he captained Clifton College, playing in the same side as John Cleese.

Results

Football

First Division

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

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Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Second Division

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

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Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Third Division

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

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Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Fourth Division

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

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Non-League

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

Reading 3, Manchester City 0

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Reading 3, Manchester City 0

SportsGuardian

Aston Villa's manager resigns

Little leaves large problem

Peter White on the sudden departure of Brian Little, a victim of pressure and latest casualty of chairman Doug Ellis's reign

BRIAN LITTLE last night resigned as the manager of Aston Villa, only one week before the Premier League club's UEFA Cup quarter-final tie against Atletico Madrid.

Little, 44, made the unexpected decision to quit the club, where he has been in charge for more than four years, after a brief meeting at Villa Park yesterday with the chairman Doug Ellis.

Demands by Ellis for an upturn in results — with 11 matches remaining, Villa lie 15th and are only six points

off the relegation zone — and growing doubts about Little's methods, expressed most recently by his former teammate Andy Gray who publicly criticised his signings as well as his handling of players, appear to be at the root of the manager's decision to go.

Hopes of building on the foundations of Villa's fifth-place finish in 1997 soon disappeared and Little's problems intensified when the striker Savo Milosevic spat in the vicinity of his own supporters during a game at Blackburn and was subsequently placed on the transfer list. When Little selected him for the game at Derby the Serb refused to play, but has since made his peace and has appeared in the club's last two matches.

In a statement Ellis said: "We are sad and disappointed to announce that Brian Little has resigned as the manager of Aston Villa. We are in the process of securing another team manager, but in the meantime assistant Allan Evans and the coaching staff will be in charge."

"We wish Brian all the best in whatever he chooses in the future."

Ellis, 74, has a history of sacking managers. In the past he has got rid of Tommy Docherty, Vic Crowe, the late Tony Barton, Graham Turner, Billy McNell, Dr Josef Venglos and Little's predecessor Ron Atkinson. The only other manager to resign during Ellis's reign was Graham Taylor, who quit the club in 1990 to become the England manager.

Little signed a new five-year contract, believed to be worth about £400,000 a year, in January 1997, but has walked out of Villa with no guarantee of a pay-off. Now Ellis must decide whether to reward him for the services he has given.

Little willingly faced 200 members of the club's share-



Strain game... Brian Little found favour with shareholders and in Europe. Elsewhere there was gloom. GRAHAM CHADWICK

holders' association less than 24 hours earlier and gave them frank answers to questions about policy and possible signings.

At the end of the meeting he was given a standing ovation. The association chairman Buck Chinn said afterwards: "I was very impressed with what Brian had to say, and I only wish the audience of supporters had been tenfold. The standing ovation was a massive vote of confidence in Brian, and that should not be

misconstrued as the chairman-type backing before he sacks a manager."

Little arrived at Villa on November 25 1994, his 41st birthday, when the club were in grave danger of relegation. He saved them from dropping into the First Division and in the following two seasons guided them to a Coca-Cola Cup victory against Leeds United at Wembley and a place in Europe.

Little was shocked when Villa lost their first four

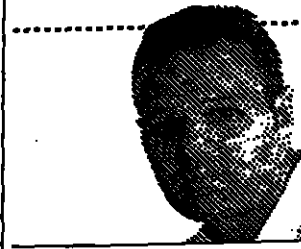
games of this season and pressure began to mount because of the lack of goals scored by Stan Collymore, his record £7 million signing from Liverpool. However, Villa reached the last eight of the UEFA Cup with victories over Bordeaux, Athletic Bilbao and Steaua Bucharest.

There was disbelief among the Villa players last night. The Portuguese full-back Fernando Nelson said: "I can't believe it, especially as there are only two months or so of

the season remaining. If it had happened earlier, or even at the end of the campaign, perhaps it would not have been so surprising, but this is a real bombshell."

Simon Grayson, signed by Little from Leicester City last summer for £1 million, said: "It has come like a bolt out of the blue. The season was still alive with the UEFA Cup. Maybe if we hadn't done well in that then we might have sensed something would happen, but certainly not before."

The race to free football from poison



Paul Hayward

RACISM off the pitch has always bedevilled football. Now there is trouble on it, too. West Ham's Eyal Berkovic says he was subjected to anti-semitic abuse by Blackburn players 11 days ago. David Mellor's Task Force has set sail, but can it clean out the slum of the xenophobic mind?

At a public forum in the House of Commons on Monday night Mellor aired a set of radical proposals aimed not at fascistic fans but prejudiced players. A racist fan is no different to a racist player, but somehow the idea of the latter seems far worse.

Mellor suggested fines and long suspensions for players caught on television mouthing racial abuse, the deduction of points from the clubs of serial offenders, publishing a league table of culprits and encouraging clubs to employ more non-whites. If his concerns are well-founded, it suggests that the richer and more popular football gets, the lower sinks its soul.

As Martin Amis once wrote, racism isn't a system of thought, it's an absence of thought, a hole where the intellect should be. Strangely, racial joshing in football is often seen by the perpetrator as an extension of an otherwise laddish culture, a pushing of locker-room humour to its most dubious limits.

The victim is supposed to know that it's not meant seriously. I have seen players being racially teased by their team-mates and, though it turns the outsider's stomach, responding only with a tolerant smile.

Weird. But then racism defies rational thought. The number of avowedly racist footballers could probably be assembled in one minibus.

But then football is about conflict, about tribal antipathy, and from the mouths of normally sane men seep thoughts that shame and probably shock even them.

Berkovic's claim is only an allegation, as was Ian Wright's notorious suggestion that Peter Schmeichel had racially abused him. Yet there are enough examples for us to believe that there is a degree of institutionalised ignorance in football.

The Football Association and PFA (the players' union) are running an expensive and high-profile campaign against racism on the terraces. They need to. At a Third Division match last season I saw half a dozen bananas land at a black player's feet. Imagine making that Saturday morning trip to the greengrocer's.

In stadiums there are still large pockets of racist chanting, not just in Britain, but Holland, Germany and Italy too. In the Old Firm match in Glasgow, Catholics and Protestants abuse each other unspeakably. Liverpool and Manchester United supporters loathe one another. All this suggests that the kind of racism football engenders springs from the confrontational and tribal nature of the game rather than black-white or Jewish-Christian antipathies.

In football it is never enough to be pro one's own team. One has to be anti everybody else's.

The Berkovic affair is serious and is unlikely to go away in a hurry. Any suggestion of anti-semitic behaviour invokes the darkest memories of our century. If racism can be graded, in one of Mellor's league tables, anti-semitism sets off the deepest revulsion because it speaks of the worst of all human crimes. If Berkovic is telling the truth, Blackburn have a real problem. If not, he's playing with fire and has insulted them unforgettably.

Confronted yesterday with Berkovic's allegations, the Blackburn manager Roy Hodgson said: "That's ridiculous and I'm not interested in that. Harry Redknapp [the West Ham manager] was very close to me and I didn't hear anything, but if he heard it, he heard it. I'm not suggesting that he didn't, but I didn't hear anything and furthermore I just think that these things are a storm in a teacup. For me the real controversy in the game surrounds the sending off of Kevin Gallacher and not what people are alleged to have said."

IN OTHER words, Hodgson doesn't really know and probably never will. But Redknapp seems to believe his man: "I had a black player been the subject of similar racist remarks the chances are there would have been a major row."

There is one anyway, and the Task Force claims to be on its way. Let it start by changing the Football Offenders' Act so individuals and not just groups can be charged for shouting abuse. It takes one fan, one player, to poison a good day out.

Banks on the march as MCC votes to keep women out

John Duncan

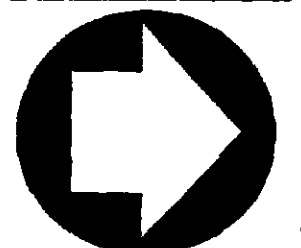
TONY BANKS, the sports minister, yesterday declared he would march on the Lord's pavilion with women who quit the club in 1990 to become the England manager.

The club's men-only rule was confirmed last night when a motion to admit women to membership received 6,998 votes for and 5,536 against, failing to secure

a two-thirds majority needed. Interviewed by Radio 5 Live's Sybil Ruscoe, Banks said he hoped a woman would challenge the decision under equal opportunities legislation. "Would you march with women on the pavilion?" asked Ruscoe. "I most certainly would," said Banks.

The Government, he said, abused the MCC received no money from the Lottery while the ban remained.

Full story, page 15



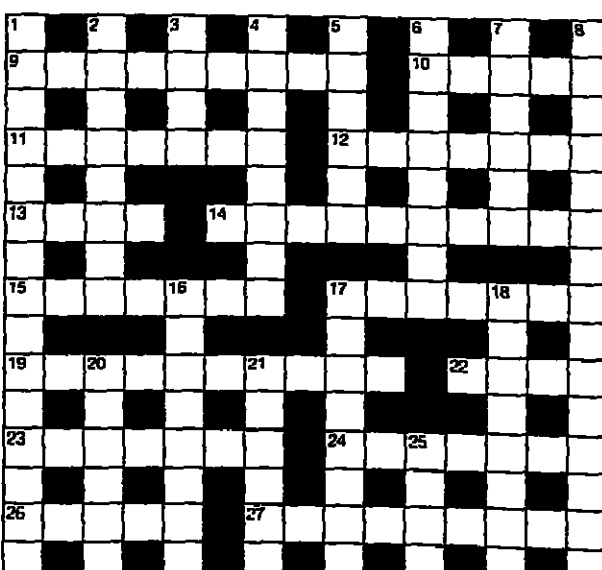
I doubt the mouse could live on cardboard because rodents only eat hard things. Otherwise their teeth grow and grow until they cut into their own head. Suddenly blood will pour out and the mouse will die in a pool of its own redness.

Notes & Queries

G2 p7

Guardian Crossword No 21,207

Set by Araucaria

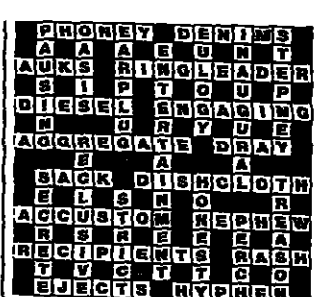


Across

- 9 26 5's day off with model recently (4,5)
- 10 Khan at home, Khan at home... (5)
- 11,20,4,27 Abstain, well born person, from pursuing the subject, and farewell (26,5) (2,3,2,6,4,4,5)
- 12 West to sort out class performer (7)
- 13 Messenger about apple (4)
- 14 Card game (duple form) ordered by referee? (8,2)
- 15 Rowland was sarcastic? A very little (4,3)
- 17 Lots of money without benefit, without love, makes a fast heart (3-4)
- 19 Baby-minder gives one a leg up with GCSE (3-7)
- 22 Attempt crazy return (4)

Down

- 1 See 3
- 2 A newspaper icon confused the capital (8)
- 3,1 Time off, in the style of parishioner's publicity, begins Keats's poem's story (1,3,1,4,2,3,5)
- 4 See 11
- 5 See 26
- 6 Beginning of title of Keats's poem entitled... (8)
- 7 Supporter on his own is a fidget (6)



CROSSWORD SOLUTION 21,206

- 8 Revenue docked by tail I tip off, not a fitting quality (15)
- 16 Giving away secrets, like the brook left earlier on (8)
- 17 Power circles in 20, under which 26 5 wrote (4,4)
- 18 Make an enemy of Sergeant Turner (8)
- 20 See 11
- 21 Hammer plant that's withered round lake in Keats's poem (6)
- 25 Go with the band (4)

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